

THE MANERA STORY

79° NORTH

| 4 SVALBARD
| 2 ISLANDS



MANERA

STAY SALTY

Svalbard

EXPLORATION

79°59'28.304» N 25°29'36.101» E

The D-day is approaching, and my excitement is through the roof. This trip was two years in the making, and it is finally happening. I'm increasingly worried of forgetting something, so I'm making lists of all the gear I need. I've previously gone on trips in cold places, but I've never done anything like this. To tell you the truth, I still have a hard time comprehending where we are going...

Svalbard, an archipelago located north of Norway. The islands range from 74° to 81° north latitude. Keep in mind that the Arctic Circle is very close at 66°30' N. The people I talk to don't really realize where it is, and I don't think I do either. I don't go into details when they ask, «So, Paul, where is your next trip?» I just reply, «On an island north of Norway,» and let them imagine what they want.

Paul Serin
Athlete & writer



We leave Longyearbyen and head straight north. We all gather next to the captain's screen to try to figure out exactly where we are going.



Our first stop will be just outside the Longyearbyen Fjord, where we will have our first session.

I step out onto the deck and look around. The air is frigid on the only part of my face that isn't covered, but my eyes are amazed at the scenery.

The sun is out on this first day. I have a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that it never sets at this time of the year. After three or four hours of sailing, we finally arrive to the first spot. The wind blows gently, the area looks clear, all lights are green.



A polar bear stands in the center-left of the frame on a snowy, rocky terrain. The background features jagged, snow-covered mountains under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**“ Another
important detail
to mention is that
on Svalbard,
there are about
2.500 inhabitants
for 3.000 polar
bears, so the
chances are high
for us to see one• ”**

Of course, our goal is for that to happen while on the boat, and not on land while inflating our kites. The groups of skiers who usually come here are always accompanied by an armed guide to protect them in case of an attack.

Our only defense tools are a flare gun and binoculars ●

Before we land on any beach, we have to scan the horizon to make sure there are no big, white fur balls around.



Bear watch
checking the spot

Matt Maxwell
Strapless wave



Fernando Mizo Novaes
Wing & surf foil



Mallory De la Villemarqu 
Strapless kite & wave



Team
EXPEDITION

Mallory “Mallo” de la Villemarqu  and Matt Maxwell are coming for strapless kite and wave, and Fernando “Mizo” Novaes for surf foil and wing.

In the media team, Olivier Sautet is our videographer and Matt Georges our photographer. Anthony Lietart is there as well to film everything happening backstage during the trip. And of course, Julien Salles, MANERA’s boss and without whom none of this would have been possible, oversees the trip.

And finally, there is me, Paul Serin, mainly for twin tip and freestyle, and some wing foil.



OLIVIER SAUTET
Videographer



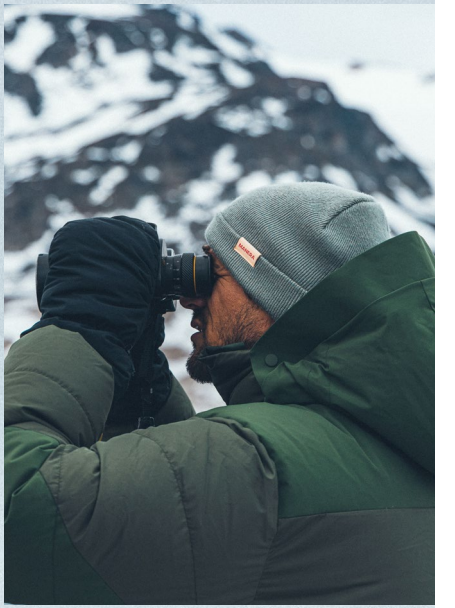
MATT GEORGES
Photographer

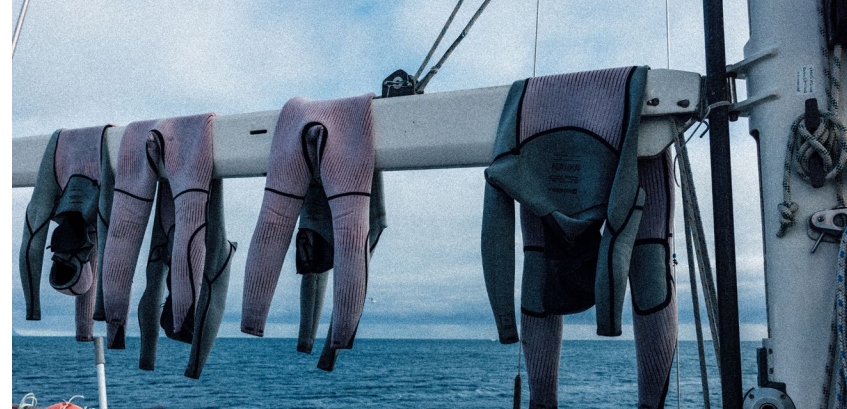


ANTHONY LIETART
Videographer & Photographer



JULIEN SALLES
Team manager





Kamak
BOAT EXPEDITION

For the next two weeks, our floating house is called Kamak. She is a 25-meter-long boat coming from Paimpol in Brittany. She normally hosts ski trips between Svalbard, Greenland, and Norway, but this time, the action will take place on the water and not in the mountains. Gaby, the captain, manages his boat perfectly. We also understand quite quickly that he is a little bit obsessive when it comes to tidying up.

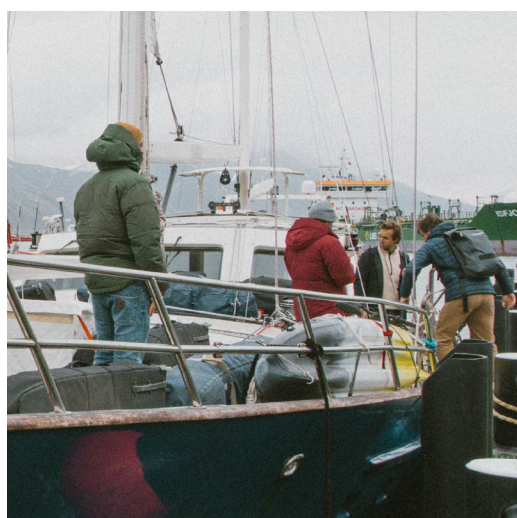
I personally don't have a problem with that, but with 20 boardbags, cameras and all their chargers, it can get out of hand pretty quickly. He is assisted by Jean, a young Breton sailor used to the cold and expeditions of this kind. Last but not least, Minh is the cook. Despite his shyness, he will be the decisive asset of this trip and responsible for the good mood of the group.

K A M
M I N



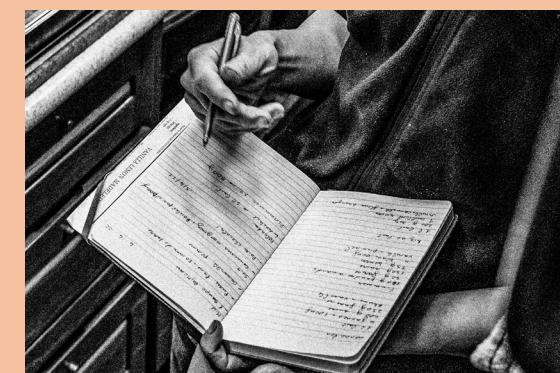
‘
But, let’s go
back to the
beginning...

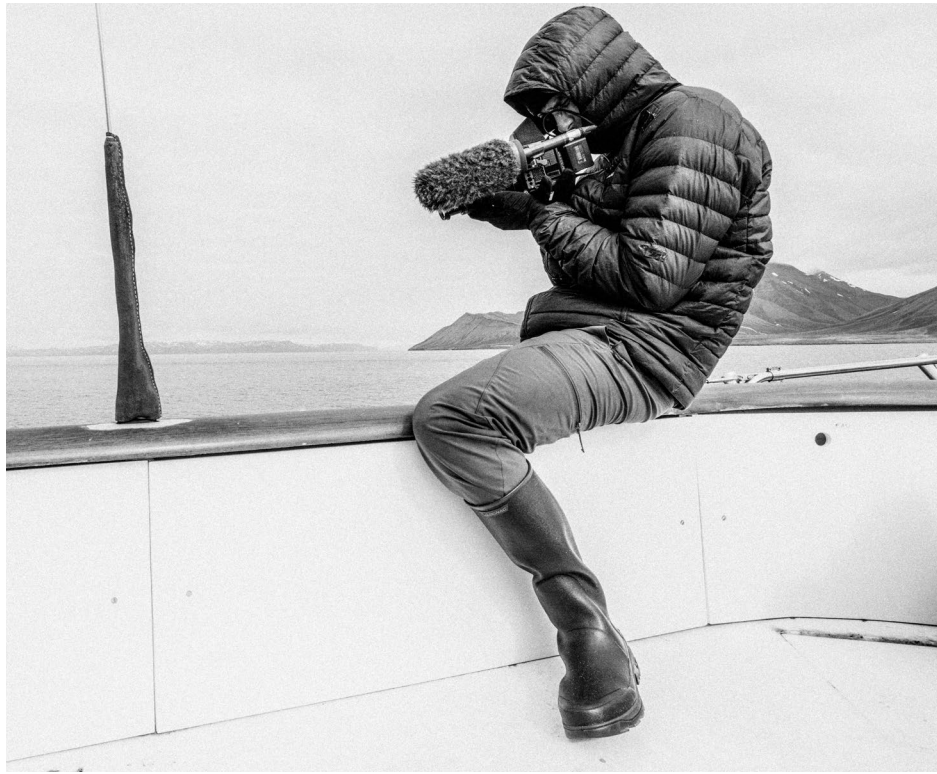
Our arrival in Longyearbyen does not go unnoticed. The other passengers on the plane think we are scientists because of all our big bags. When we explain that we are here to kite surf, their eyes widen, showing both astonishment and compassion.



*Yes, we will kitesurf in one of the
most extreme and northern
places in the world.*

Just writing these words
gives me goosebumps.



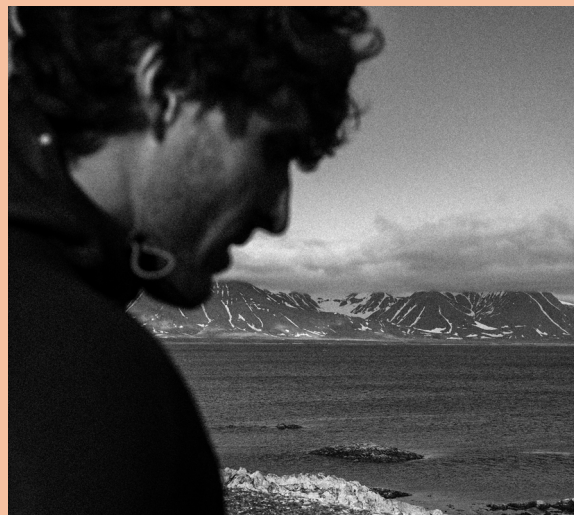


‘
I get
into the
dinghy
with
Mallo,

and Jean
takes us
to the
beach.



The landing area is slightly below a small hill, so we can't see if anything is up there waiting for us. As soon as we set foot on the ground, Mallo and I instantly look at each other, the same idea obviously having crossed our minds. We sprint up the hill to see what's above us, brandishing our kite bars and screaming, driven by a surge of unconsciousness.



I take my time to ride and enjoy the landscape. I feel like an ant in a world of humans. The mountains are high and steep, and the plains stretch as far as the eye can see. I also imagine the potential animals that could be underwater in such a remote corner of the world. But as soon as these thoughts cross my mind, I immediately turn around to get closer to the boat.

No white-haired animal is
waiting for us up there. On
the other hand, reindeer
antlers and the immensity
of nature are. Once the
adrenaline rush is over, we
get into the water. It is cold
and the wind is light, but
the sun feels so good.





***Where exactly are we going?
To Svalbard, an archipelago located
north of Norway.***

The islands range from
74° to 81° north latitude.



79°59'28.304» N 25°29'36.101» E



*I rush
to put
on my
wetsuit
and my
boots,*

especially as I can sense that
Gaby does not want to stay here
for a long time because of the
ice and the bad weather.







Mizo joins me on the water. I don't even have time to tell him to watch out for the submerged ice blocks that he hits one and goes flying right in front of me. At least, I don't have to worry about that on my twin tip.





The wind is strange, irregular in strength and direction. I feel that Olivier and Matt are betting a lot on this session, so I give it my all.

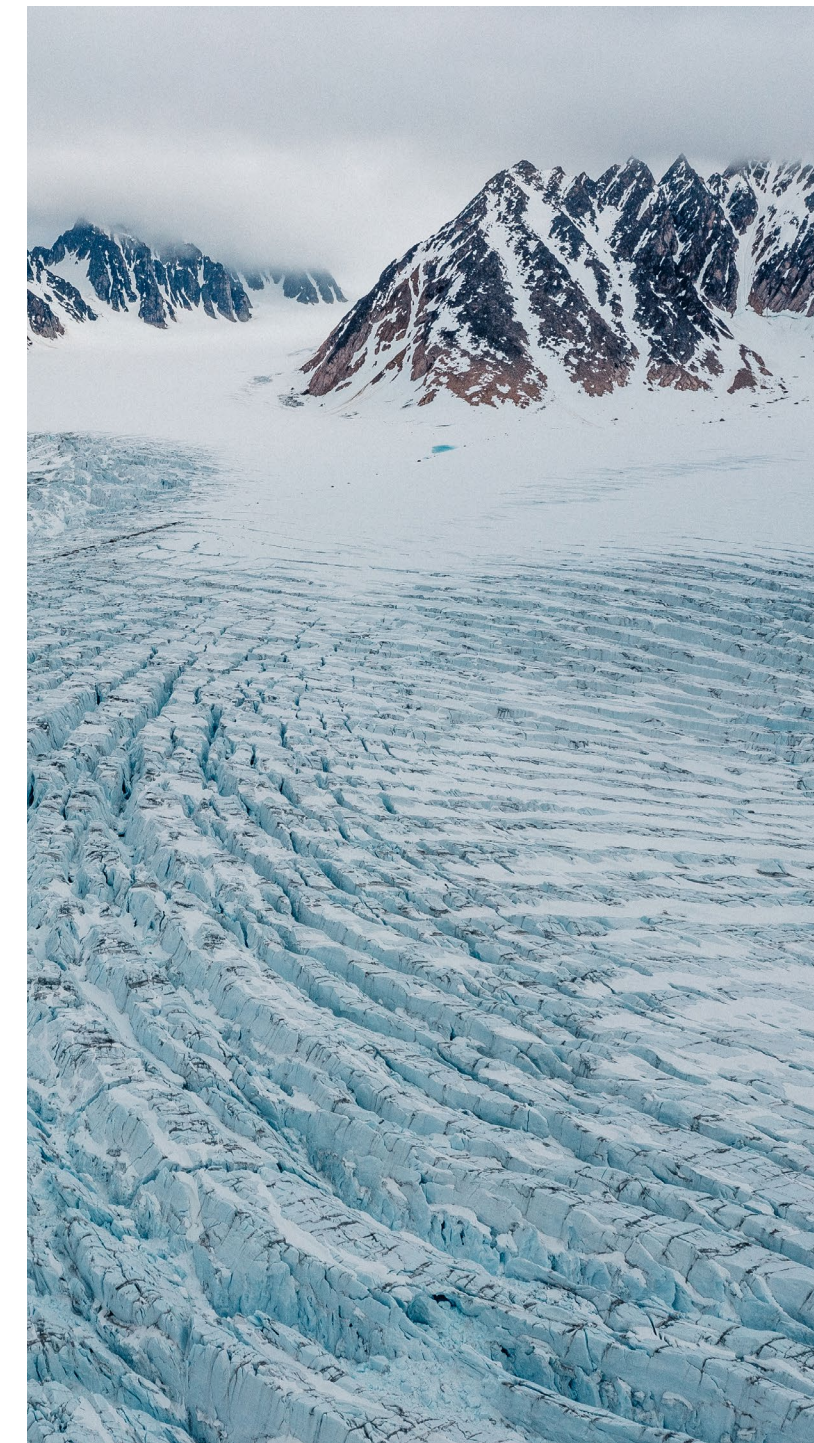


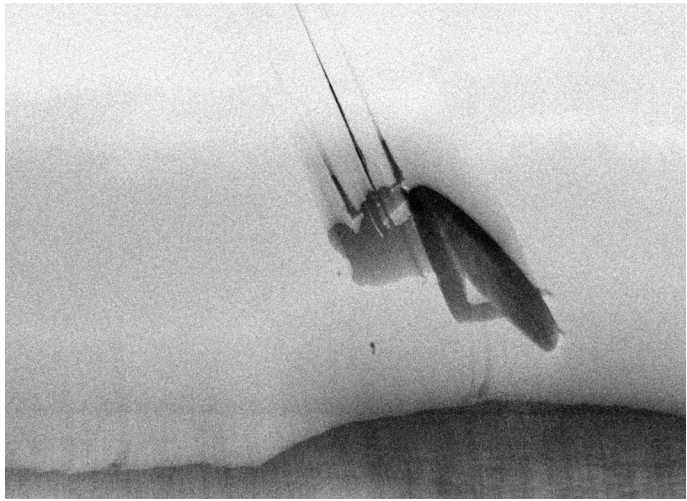
‘

*the glacier is behind
my back.*



*I can't really see it, but they
can. Apparently, it's pretty
insane.*







At sea

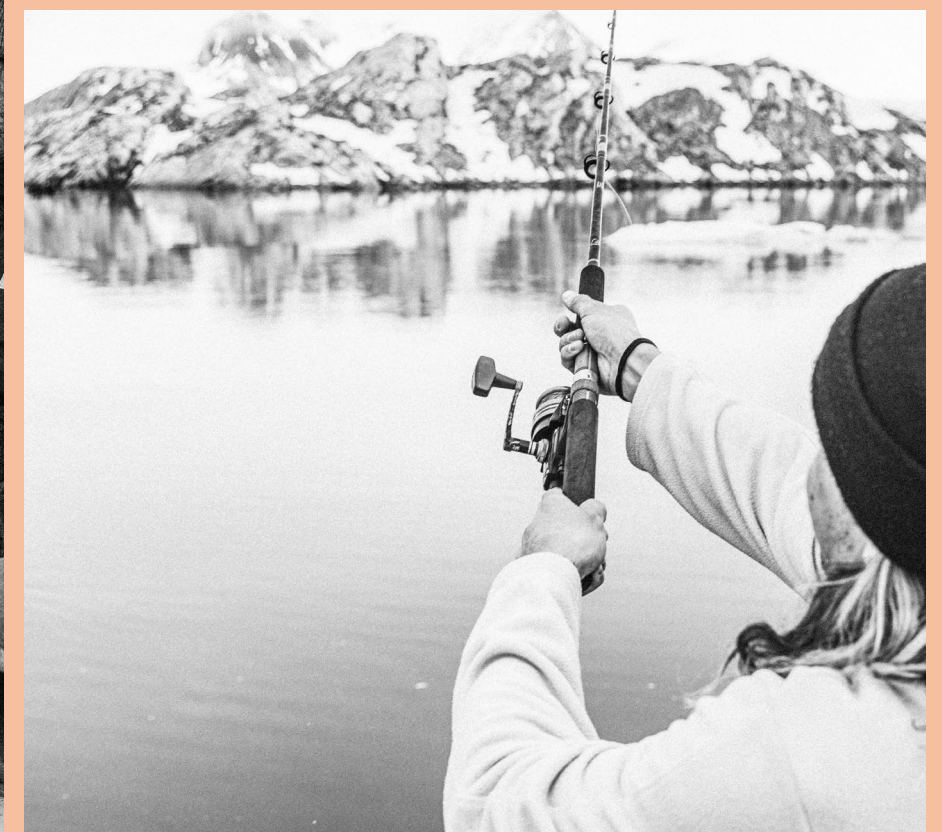
LITTLE BY LITTLE

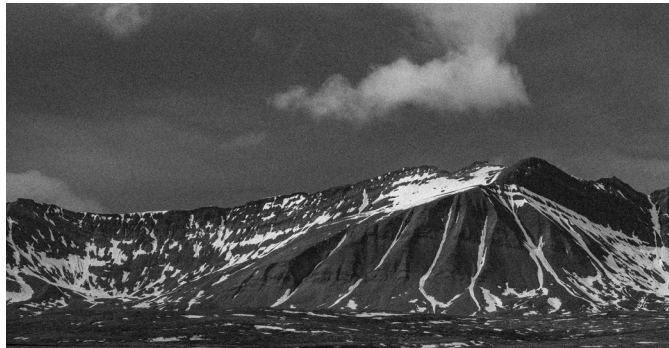
Afterwards, 10 hours of navigation are still ahead of us to reach the north of Svalbard and exactly the 79th parallel north. The first dinner is joyful. It's a treat to eat Minh's dishes, which he also makes in great quantity. With this group of hungry guys, it is something crucial to keep in mind.

The cellular network has left us for good. Strangely enough, we all suddenly feel closer to one another. No more phones vibrating on the table during meals, nor «Wait, I'll check on Google if it's true». We are back to the essential: us, the boat, the trip.»

We make headway little by little, but our current GPS point always feels so far away from our destination. We end up sailing for 15 hours instead of 10.

A wave of relief washes over us when the captain announces that we have finally arrived. On the map, we can see the beginning of the sea ice which is only a few kilometers away.



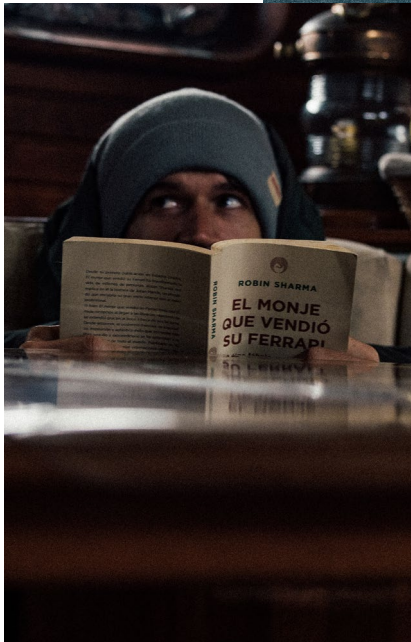


The GPS indicates
the long-awaited
79° North ●

*It hasn't really hit me yet; I just know
that we are very, very far up north.
The hours don't really have any value
anymore. I put my watch away in my
bag. Only meals punctuate our days.*



79° 59' 28.304" N 25° 29' 36.101" E



Polar bears
WILD & MYTHICAL



Svalbard wild area

On the way back from a short freestyle session, where I had to be barefoot as it is impossible to put on neoprene boots and then fit into the freestyle boots, Gaby warns us on the radio that a bear is walking around nearby.



We get as close as possible while keeping
our distance so as not to disturb it.

I am frozen from the session, but I don't
even think about it. We are in front of a
polar bear.

**This animal is
so mythical!**

I think back to all the books I read as
a child but also to all the images and
documentaries I've seen on it, and on its
natural environment that is disappearing
because of us and our actions.

**I feel like I'm looking at a living
work of art that nature has
created without permission.**

And then there is the present moment when
we, humans, are face-to-face with it.

I have mixed feelings. On one hand, I feel
guilty for seeing this bear, for being here.

On the other hand, I see this living being
staring at us and looking anything but
unhappy.

**We must do everything to
ensure that these bears do
not disappear.**

Our generation and future generations must
protect this more than anything else.

Our children must be able to talk about
polar bears in the present tense, and not in
the past.

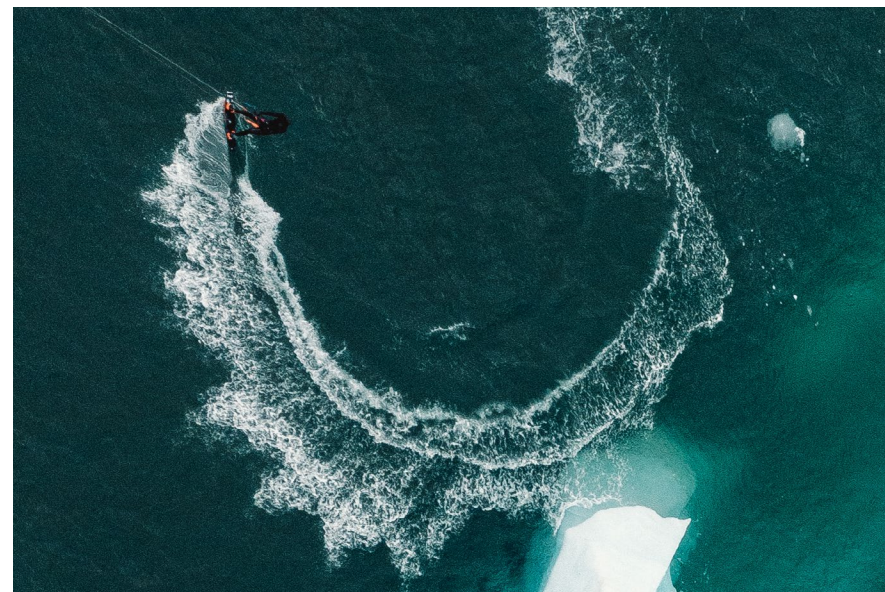
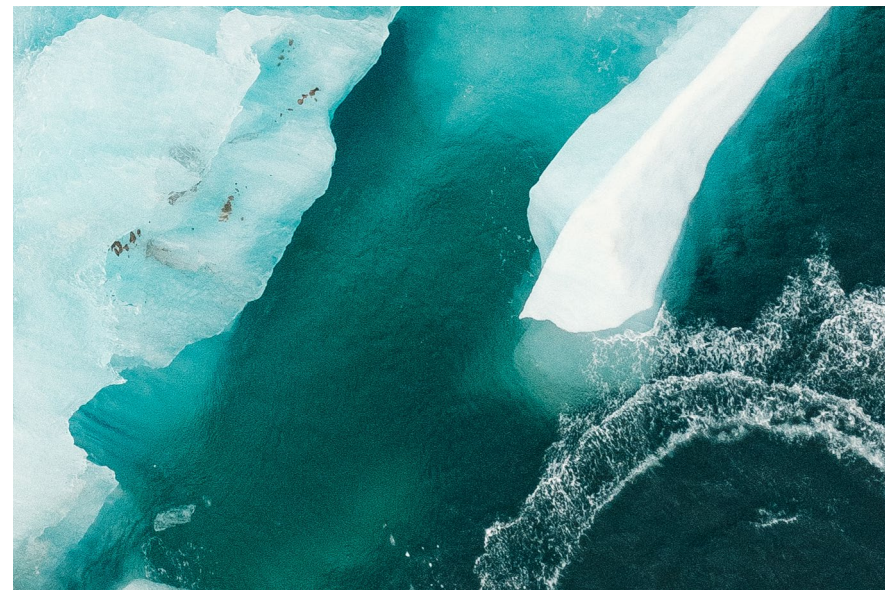




We return to the same spot the following day. Walrus watch us go by, unconcerned. With Mallo, we spot a drifting iceberg on the other side of the channel. Just like our little adventure on the beach during the first session, we look at each other and immediately rush to see it, although it is farther than we thought.



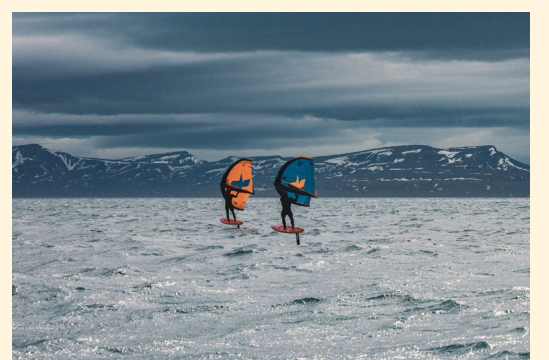
When we finally get there, we discover a piece of ice of a midnight blue color, and of a much bigger size than anticipated. We are both a little impressed, but we still try a few tricks around it... Until a piece comes off, and the whole iceberg starts to rise. My heart races as I can already picture both of us stuck under it in frozen waters.



A few minutes later, it has visibly and thankfully stabilized. We do a few more small jumps, but eventually decide to head back before it gets bad or the wind drops.



Mizo is wing foiling around the boat. For a Brazilian who rides in shorts all year, he has a rather exceptional resistance to cold.





Trapper
MANERA STYLE



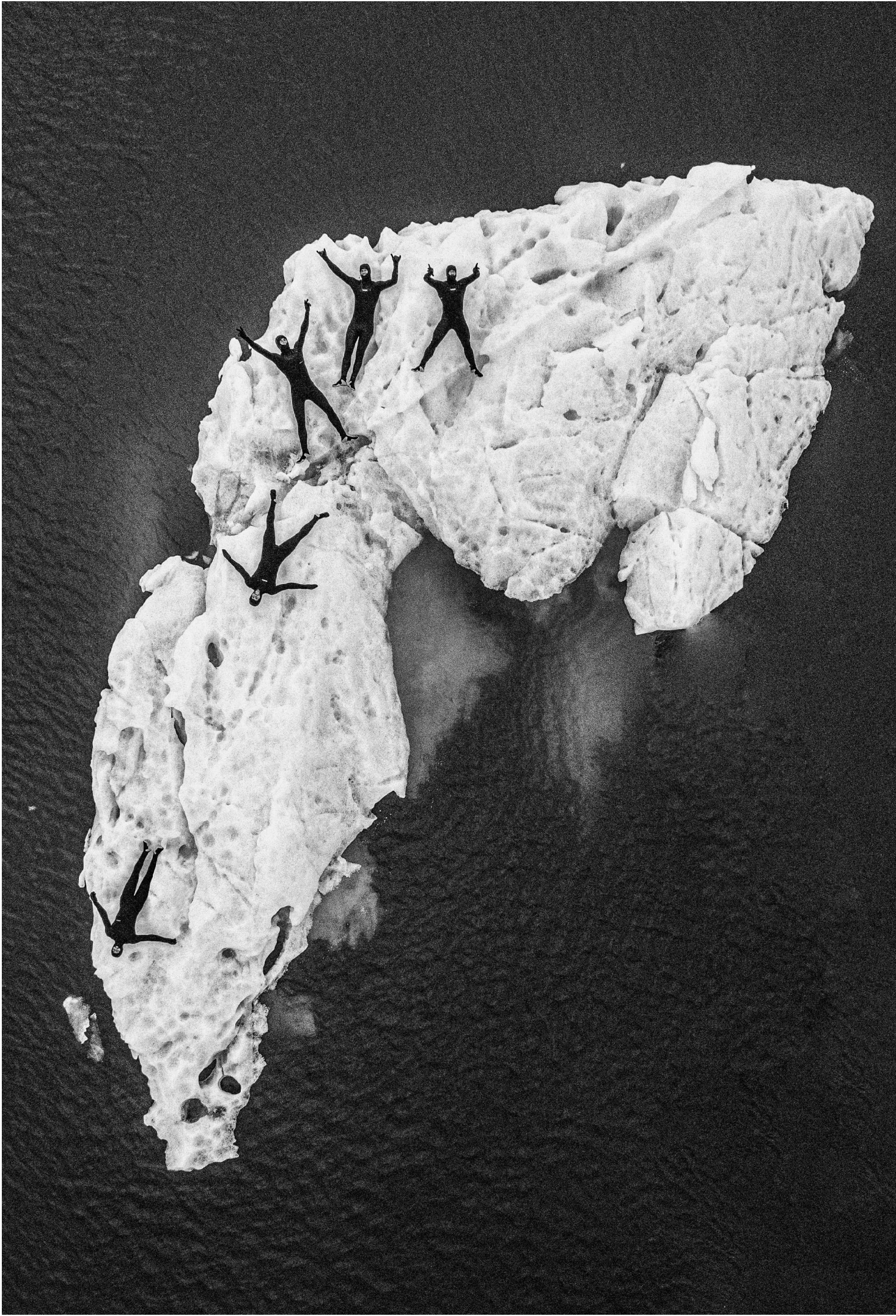
Boat fitting room

When we arrive to the anchorage, the wind is more than absent, but the landscape is hypnotizing.

“
This huge mass of ice has been carved in time.



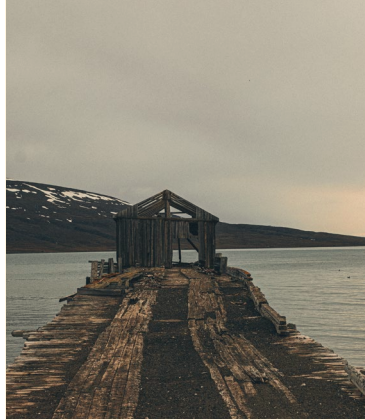
We gear up to foil around the drifting ice blocks, but it's hard to do anything without any wind. We end up simply having fun on the ice, jumping in the water like kids and most importantly, as if the water was actually warm when it was probably only 2°C.





A gale is expected in a few days, so we have to be patient until then. Gaby is analyzing all the options so that we are at the same time safe and on a rideable spot.





The sun is out again on this penultimate evening
Olivier has been talking about going for a swim
only in his swim trunks since the beginning of this
trip. It's now or never.

**It's midnight, but
we all feel like
it's noon ●**

He jumps first in the water, which again likely
does not exceed 3°C. It's more or less bearable, but
we only very quickly splash around like the real
warriors we are!

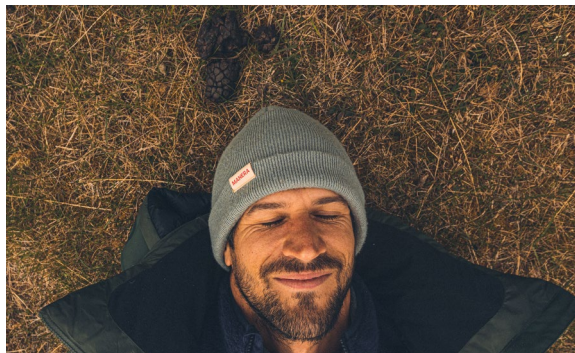


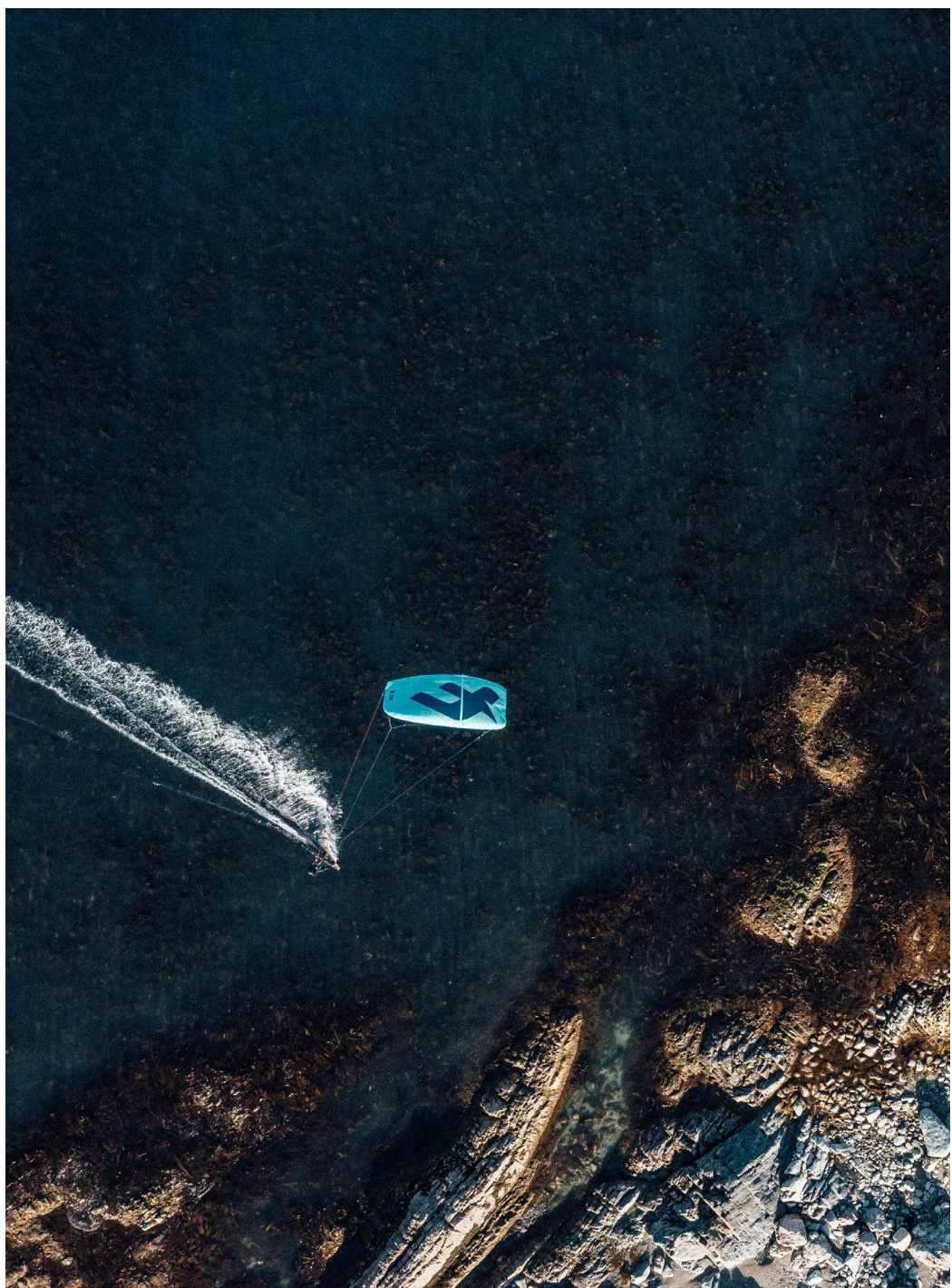
After dinner, we lie down on the deck. The sun is
shining brightly. Reindeers leisurely walk around
and look at us while grazing. Time seems to be
frozen. Nobody wants to go to bed.





«So, Paul, where is your next trip?» I just reply, «On an island north of Norway.»





*The night
is noisy.
The
halyards
of the boat
whistle
very loudly.*

The fjord where we finally anchor is perfect to shelter us from the incoming storm. More than 35 knots are forecasted. Some gusts are so strong that I fear we will start dragging anchor.



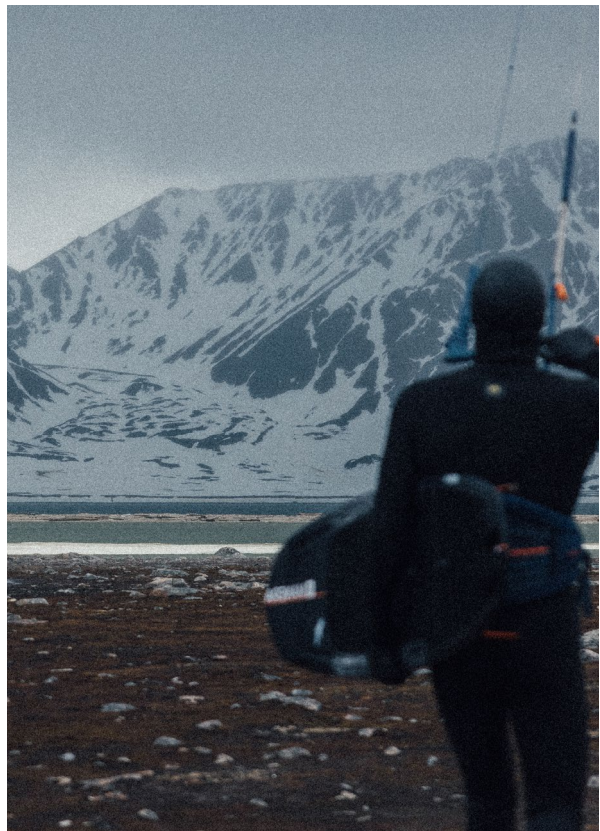
Fjord storm

35 KNOTS

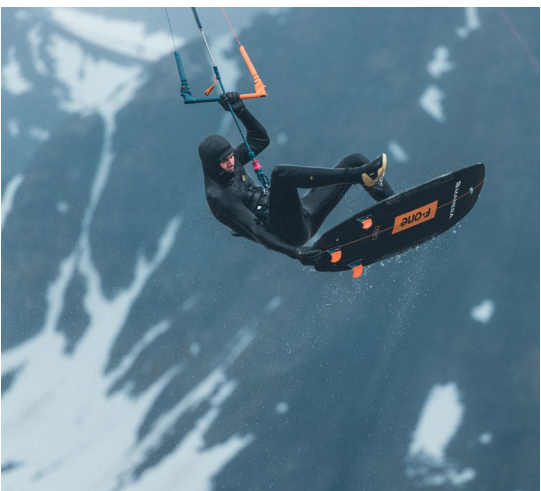
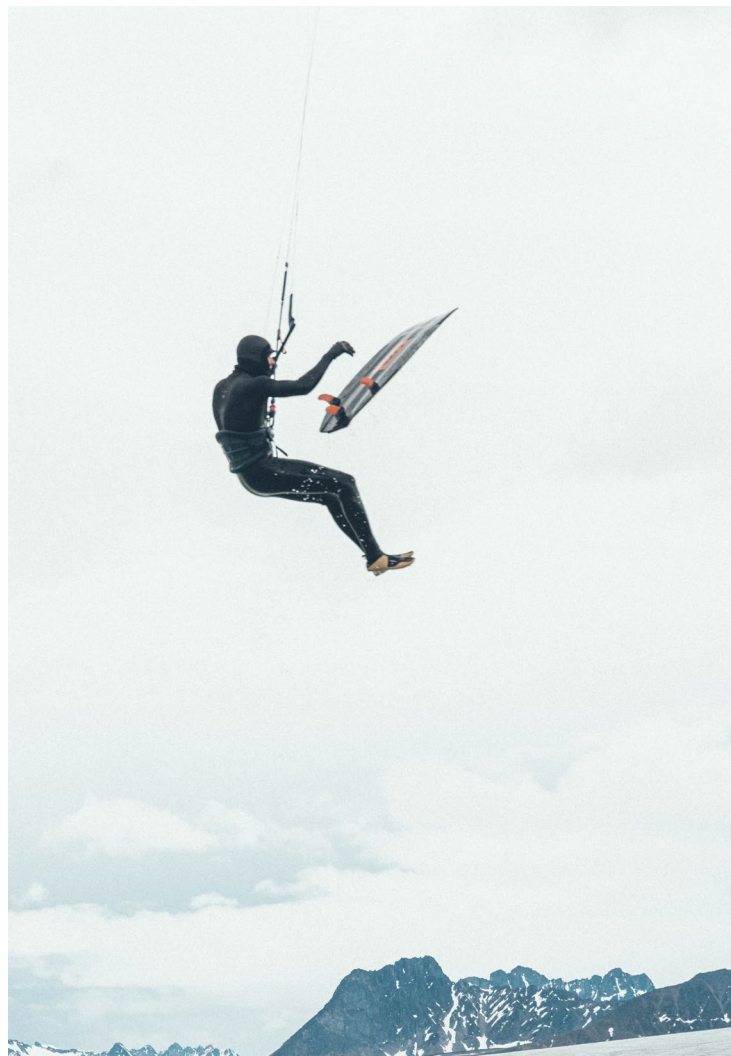
Everyone is able to get a session in at our next anchorage: strapless for Matt, wing foil for Mizo and me, and a bit of twin tip for Mallo. We all feel fatigued. The freezing cold and the lack of sun are wearing on us, on top of the lack of communication with our loved ones. Moreover, I feel that we are all a bit eager to head back, as daily life in this tight, cramped space is becoming difficult.

The following day, we start sailing at around 7:00. We continue moving south. The phone signal was supposed to come back halfway through this sail, but it only came back timidly, just enough to let messages through but not enough to answer them.









At breakfast, we go over what we still need to shoot. Olivier really wants more freestyle. We get in the water with Mallo, him on a twin tip and me in my freestyle boots. From the boat, the spot looks cool. But once we get on the water, it is probably the worst wind I've ever ridden in, and I'm not the only one to say so.



The air pockets and gusts are so abrupt that I find myself crashing on simple tricks. After many attempts, I give up. I can already picture myself injured while having to sail back to the harbor in a massive swell for more than four or five hours.

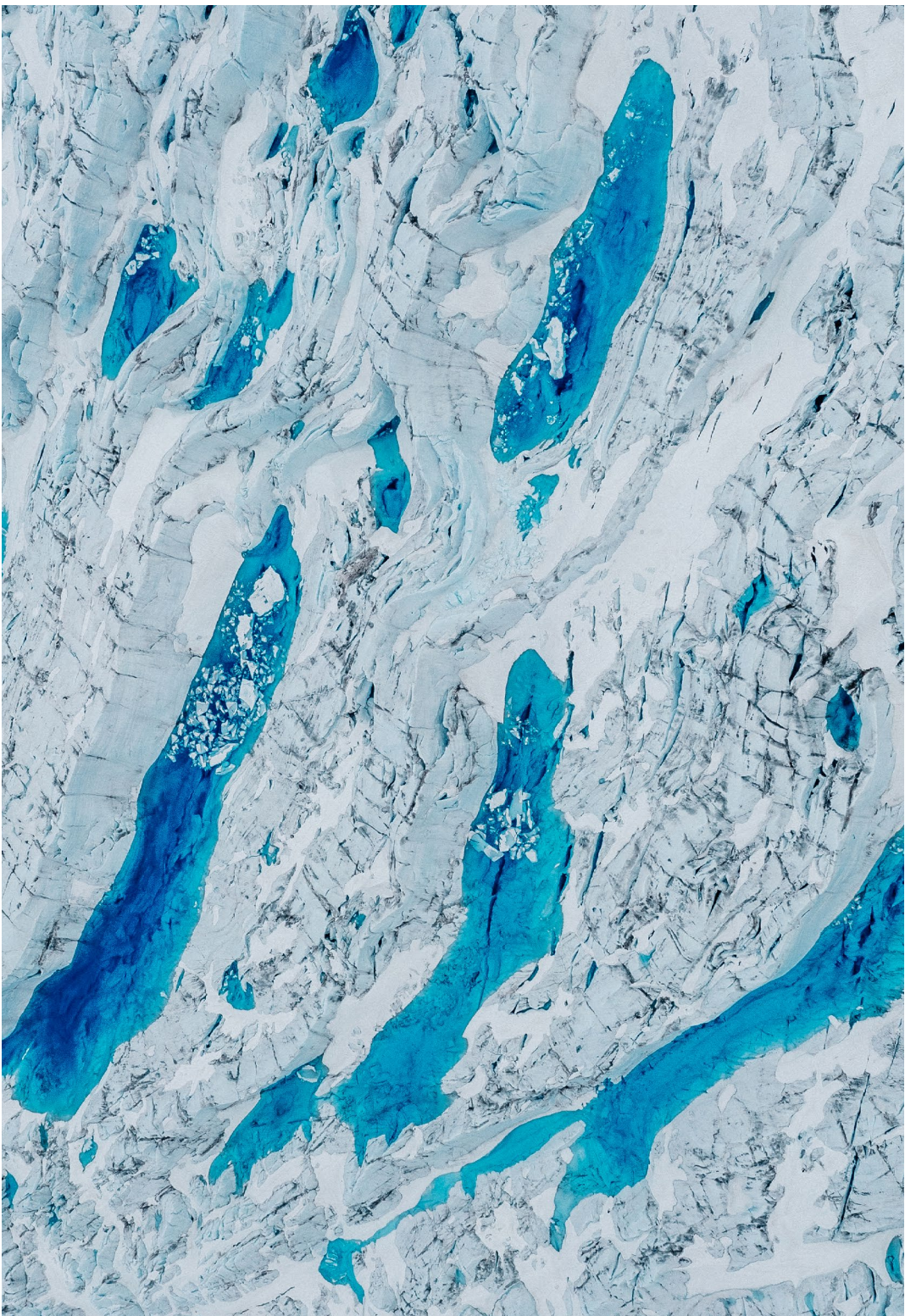


In the afternoon, the wind speed doubles. It is impressive even from the boat, but Matt and I still try to do some Big Air. The wind ends up being exactly as we thought: horrible on all accounts. We try and give our all, but we quickly decide to stop fighting against these horrible conditions.



‘
*The wind speed doubles,
it is impressive.*





The sun is as bright as ever, even though it's 1:00. The end of a trip is always filled with a lot of emotions, even though we all have wanted to go home at some point. Either way, we can't help but feel a bit blue when thinking about returning to our respective countries.



A human adventure, or a trip with friends in the Arctic Circle, call it what you want.

In the end, it does really matter. The important thing is to come back ●



Arctic wanderer
Manera athlete



TEAM

Manager / Julien Salles
Riders / Paul Serin, Matt Maxwell,
Mallory de la Villemarqué, Fernando Mizo Novaes
Videographers / Olivier Sautet & Anthony Lietart
Photographers / Matt Georges & Anthony Lietart

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CERTIFICATIONS





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