



Toftevaag goes North

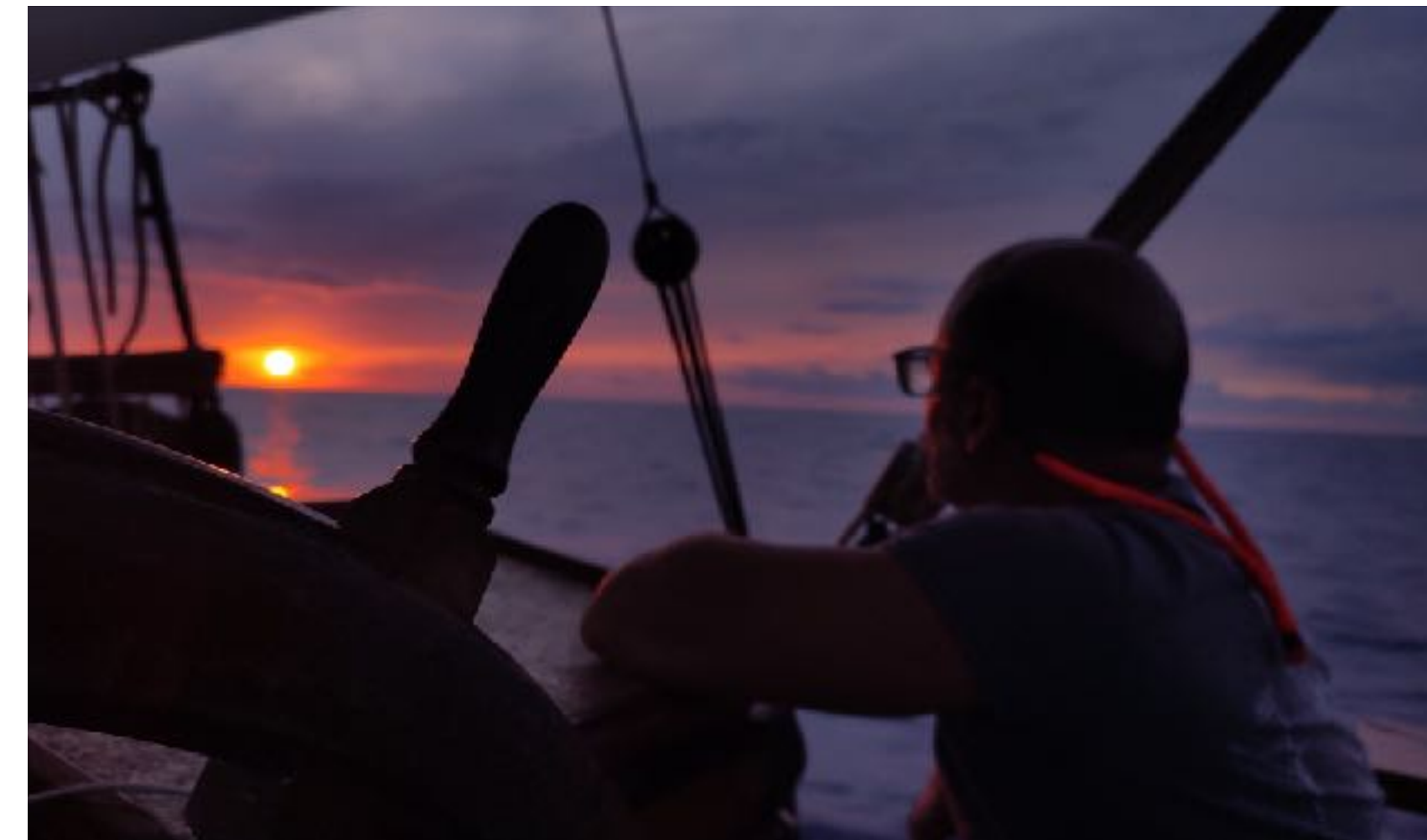


Toftevaag

Research vessel

Toftevaag is an 18-metre 1910 Norwegian ship that was originally a fishing ketch, but has been effectively converted into a platform for a new purpose: scientific research in the Mediterranean open sea ecosystem.

The name *Toftevaag* aptly means “Meeting Place”, and has welcomed over 3000 volunteers from over 90 nations. Each and every participant will be provided with key training and instructions for living and working on board.





The next great adventure, after 32 years of tireless work in the Med

In June 1990, after a year of restoration in the shipyard of Öckerö Båtvärk (Sweden) and a rough crossing of the Bay of Biscay, the Toftevaag entered the Mediterranean making 12 knots with a fresh westerly wind. We were heading for Tunisia for our first project focusing on the conservation of sea turtle nesting beaches, Posidonia seagrass meadows and the design of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), under a contract for Greenpeace.

32 years have come and gone since then. She has worked non-stop, six months per year, conducting research and educational programs, designing and monitoring MPAs, developing risk mitigation measures and actively engaging citizens, students, teachers and stakeholders in the conservation of our natural and cultural maritime heritage. Toftevaag leaves in her wake a proud and long list of environmental and social achievements flying the ALNITAK flag.

Keeping Toftevaag afloat and active for 32 years is ALNITAK's first achievement. Over 70% of Toftevaag is still Norwegian pine, nailed together with wooden pins. If you take a photograph on board now, and print it in black & white, you could fool anyone to believe the picture was from the early 20th century.

This 2023, ALNITAK begins a new great adventure: Toftevaag's journey home, to her natal Fjord in Norway. This voyage will be a true "Journey to Ithaca": another way of life, taking it slow, enjoying every breath we take and every harbour we discover along the way. Our aim is to rebel against the fast-paced modern world and take as long as possible, enjoying the present and truly reconnecting with the essence of Life, rediscovering a daily existence that does not harm our planet. Dare to hop on board for the adventure?

Our programme

Summary

Since 1990 ALNITAK has been conducting open sea expeditions focusing on top pelagics (whales, dolphins, turtles, elasmobranchs, tunas, mantas and birds) and human activities. These 11-day Expeditions are intensive, weather-dependant and no two Expeditions are the same. While these new expeditions aren't as intense or focused on research, they will have a similar organisation.

Volunteers joining are integrated quickly as part of the crew, experiencing our daily lives as sailors on a historic wooden ship. This is [not a tour or pleasure cruise](#), and we are honoured to have the "Mediterranean's most uncomfortable ship" with a culture of keeping active and busy.

If you have trouble adapting to living in small quarters, waking up early, and working long hours, this may not be an Expedition for you. However, if you are looking for a true adventure dictated by the weather, meeting like-minded people, working with a small dedicated team, conducting important research and tackling modern-day conservation issues, we have a bunk bed ready waiting for you.





Toftevaag back in the days

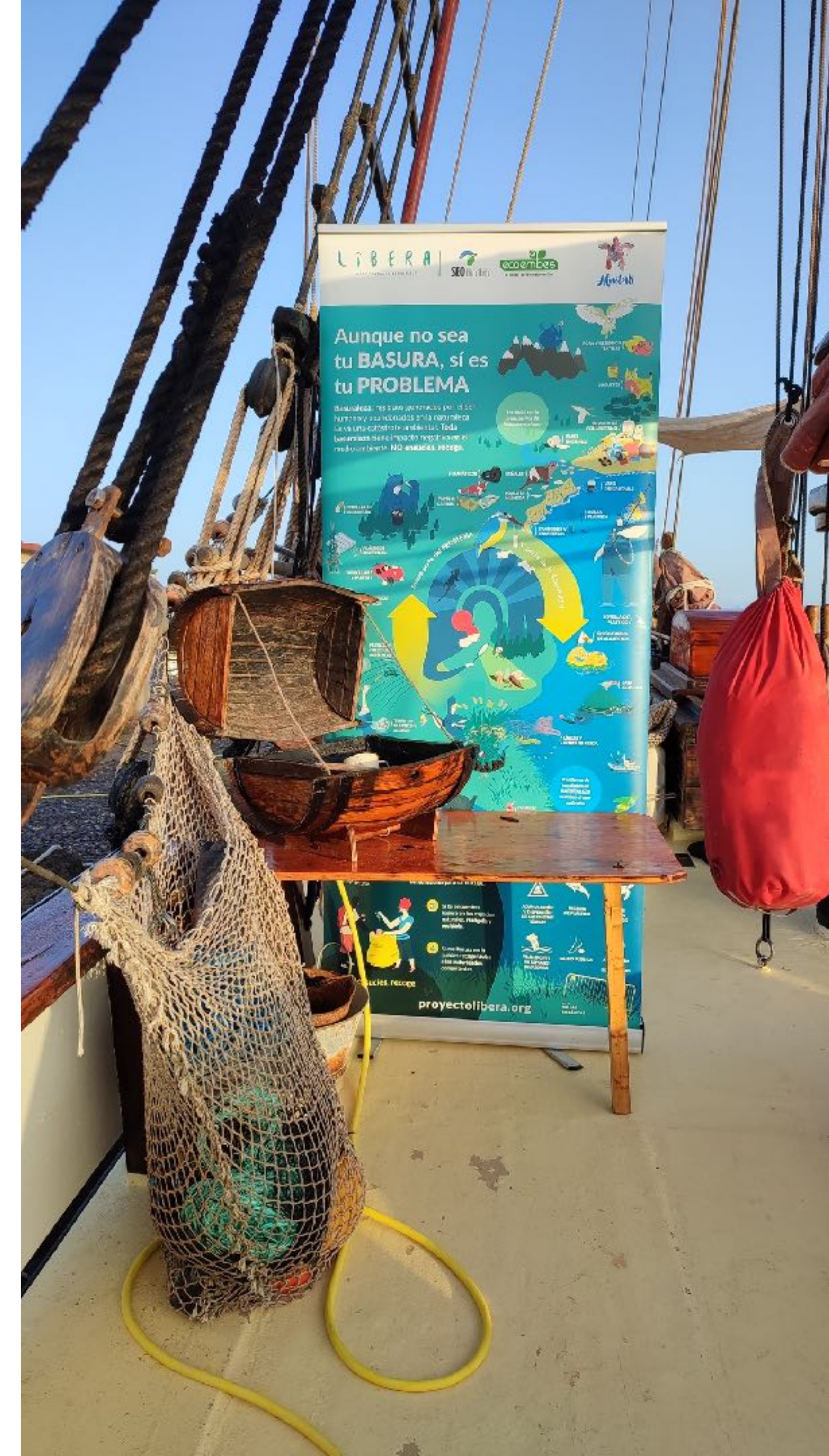
These expeditions are developed in the framework of our Todos por la Mar – LIBERA program, where once again Toftevaag becomes a “meeting point” for people passionate about the sea, living by our motto of “nobody lifts 1.000 kg alone”.

We want to hop from fishing port to fishing port to exchange perspectives with fishers and navigators, to engage them in the Libera network and to see how we can best contribute to the conservation of our Ocean’s natural and cultural treasures.

Other aspects of expedition logistics will be quite similar to conventional Alnitak expeditions. We will share the costs of the journey: food, fuel, ports. And we will share all household tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning and doing the dishes, following our safety and sustainability policy as always.



A major task of volunteers during the visits to ports will be showing Toftevaag to visitors and befriending local fishers, teachers, navigators therefore learning about the culture of the area and how the ocean connects us all.



Our impact

Over the years we can highlight some of Alnitak's accomplishments in great part thanks to the work done each season onboard *Toftevaag*:

- *Design, management and monitoring of 14 MPAs both in the Mediterranean and beyond.
- *Reconfiguration of IMO traffic separation schemes.
- *Mitigating the risk of turtle bycatch (over 95% - estimated between 20 and 30,000 loggerhead turtles per year in long-lining).
- *Mitigation of the risk of noise pollution.
- *Contributing to species management plans, for example of the endangered Mediterranean common dolphin.
- *"Train the trainers" programmes for fishers, scientists and stakeholders in the EU, Africa and Latin America.
- *Contributing to policy frameworks, actively cooperating with UNDP GEF, FAO GEF, ACCOBAMS, NOAA, etc.



Day 1 - Arrival day

We typically meet at 17:00 close to the port at a café/restaurant, we usually have a drink together prior to embarking. Sometimes *Toftevaag* is in a port (close to the meeting point) or on occasions it may be anchored in a bay and we will have to go with our rib.

This will be your first day meeting everyone and becoming accustomed to the ship: selecting your bunk bed, organising your belongings, learning how everything works (including our infamous “toilet talk”). Additional instructions will be provided by the skipper regarding the weather forecast, expedition objectives and planned activities.





Day 2 to Day 10 - Sailing/Boat Maintenance/Other Activities

If the weather conditions are suitable, the engines may start as early as 4:00 AM to ensure we are on our way and make the most of the day (this doesn't necessarily mean that you need to be up for this, but you are welcome to experience this night voyage if you wish). The day officially begins at around 7:00 AM for breakfast. Those with early duties will be expected to be in their positions on time. During the first day, the crew will guide you through the tasks you will help us with while on board: navigation/cooking/cleaning/boat maintenance, etc...

During your stay with us there will be ONE OFF day for both the Alnitak team and volunteers. Alnitak's team uses this "OFF day" to carry out office work. We are a very small team therefore please respect this assigned time the team will need to do their land based work.

Day 11 - Disembarkation day

Last day onboard, although we welcome mutineers! Departure times must be communicated to ensure we are back in harbour on time in order to meet everyone's travel arrangements. Even though this is a farewell, from this day onwards you will be part of the *Toftevaag* family and we hope you stay in touch... or even join us again! No two expeditions are the same, and some volunteers have made a *Toftevaag* expedition part of their yearly plans!

Maritime culture: in the wake of Ants Lepson, our main theme for this part of our voyage



In this quest to take Toftevaag home, we will be focusing on joining the dots of various pieces of maritime history & culture which involve, or revolve around, her own story.

On 10 October 1989 ALNITAK’s founders Ric and Ana arrived in the port of Arendal (Norway) to take charge of the historical fishing boat Toftevaag and move her to Öckerö (Sweden) for restoration. There, they met an old sailor who approached and offered to help them. His name was Ants Lepson. That afternoon Ric and Ana were invited to his house, where they found themselves surrounded by awe-inspiring maritime paintings. It turned out Mr Lepson was a renown painter in Scandinavia. For some reason, he suddenly beckoned the young ALNITAK founders towards a locked door. “I’m going to show you a room I’ve never shown anyone”. They poked their heads in to find a very different collection: simple paintings of green meadows, colourful steam trains and windmills. “That is how I remember Estonia” he said, almost to himself, and closed the door.

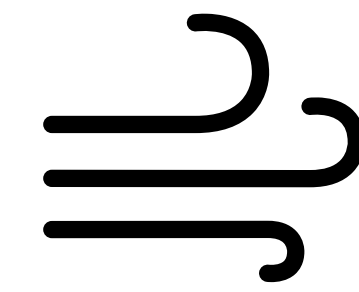


The story of Ants Lepson’s life has fascinated us ever since. He loves Spain - for good reasons we will explore - and his story involves escaping from his country of origin, becoming a refugee in America, and a perilous voyage on a sister ship of Toftevaag’s, the *Prolific* (left).

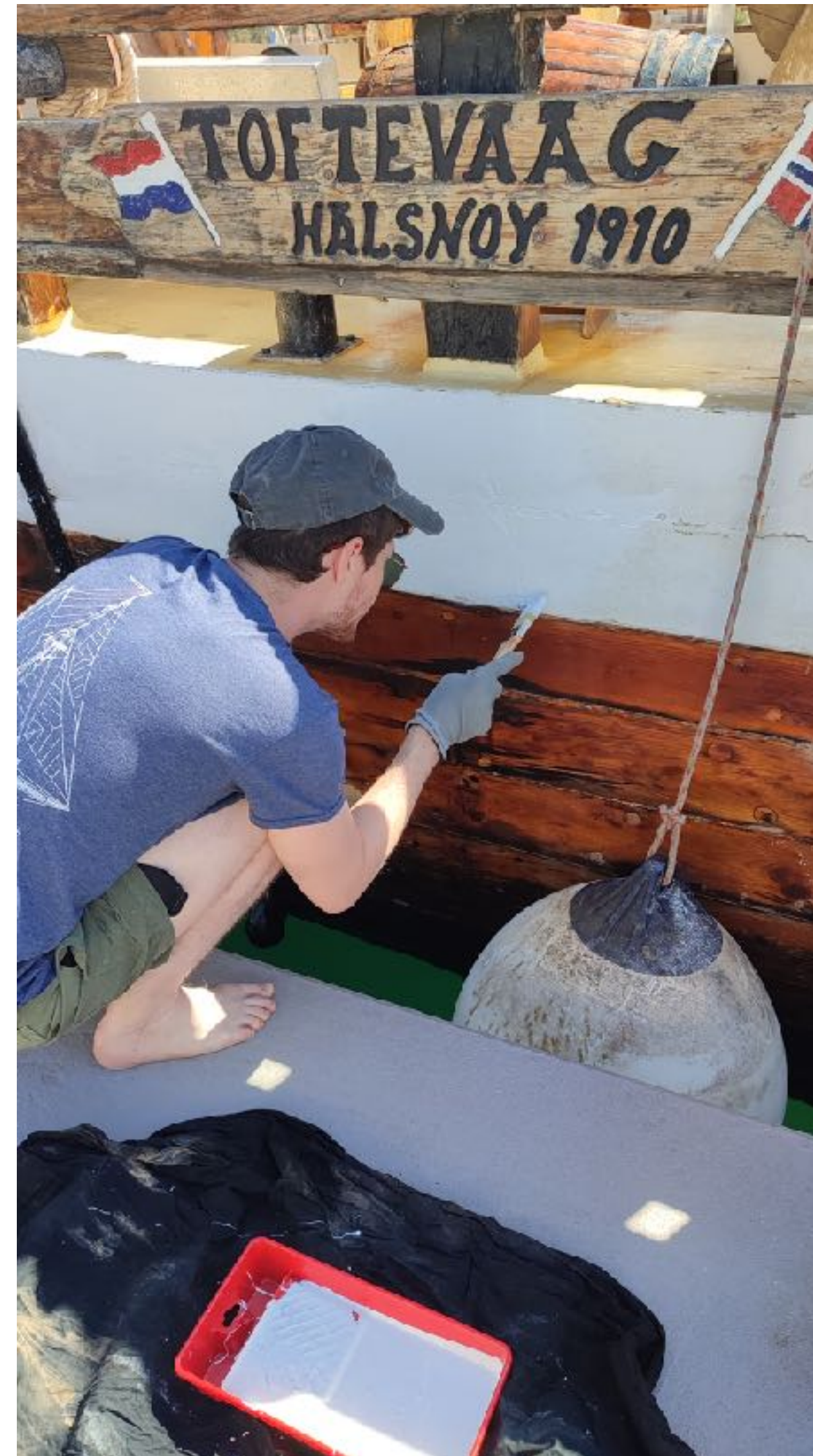
You could say that Ants Lepson was the very first ALNITAK volunteer, embodying the passion, humility, generosity and positive attitude that we love to have on board Toftevaag. Our journey North will help us visit some key places to learn more about his story, and that of our own ship.

“A clean ship is a happy ship!” is one of our mottos on board *Toftevaag*, which is why it’s important that everyone contributes to the ongoing “house” chores. These include preparing meals, cleaning the galley and bathroom, scrubbing the deck, washing the dishes after each meal etc. and are vital for the overall hygiene of the ship as well as well-being of it’s inhabitants. While on expedition, *Toftevaag* is our home-away-from-home and together we strive to keep it as organised and clean as possible!





Unfavourable weather conditions



On occasions weather conditions may not be ideal (windy and/or wavy) therefore we will have to stay in harbour. Most importantly, it is also a matter of safety.

Please be flexible with last minute changes in plans as our work is very weather dependant. There are different tasks which we might need help with: attending visitors, sorting multimedia, boat maintenance, as well as other duties

Alternatively, we may decide to visit coastal areas and do a beach clean up. Sometimes we may also organise presentations below deck as there is a lot of theory behind these expeditions.

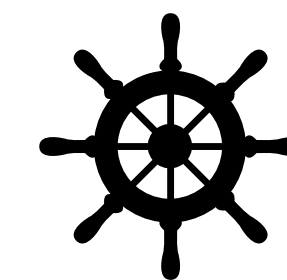


Quick reference sign-up checklist:

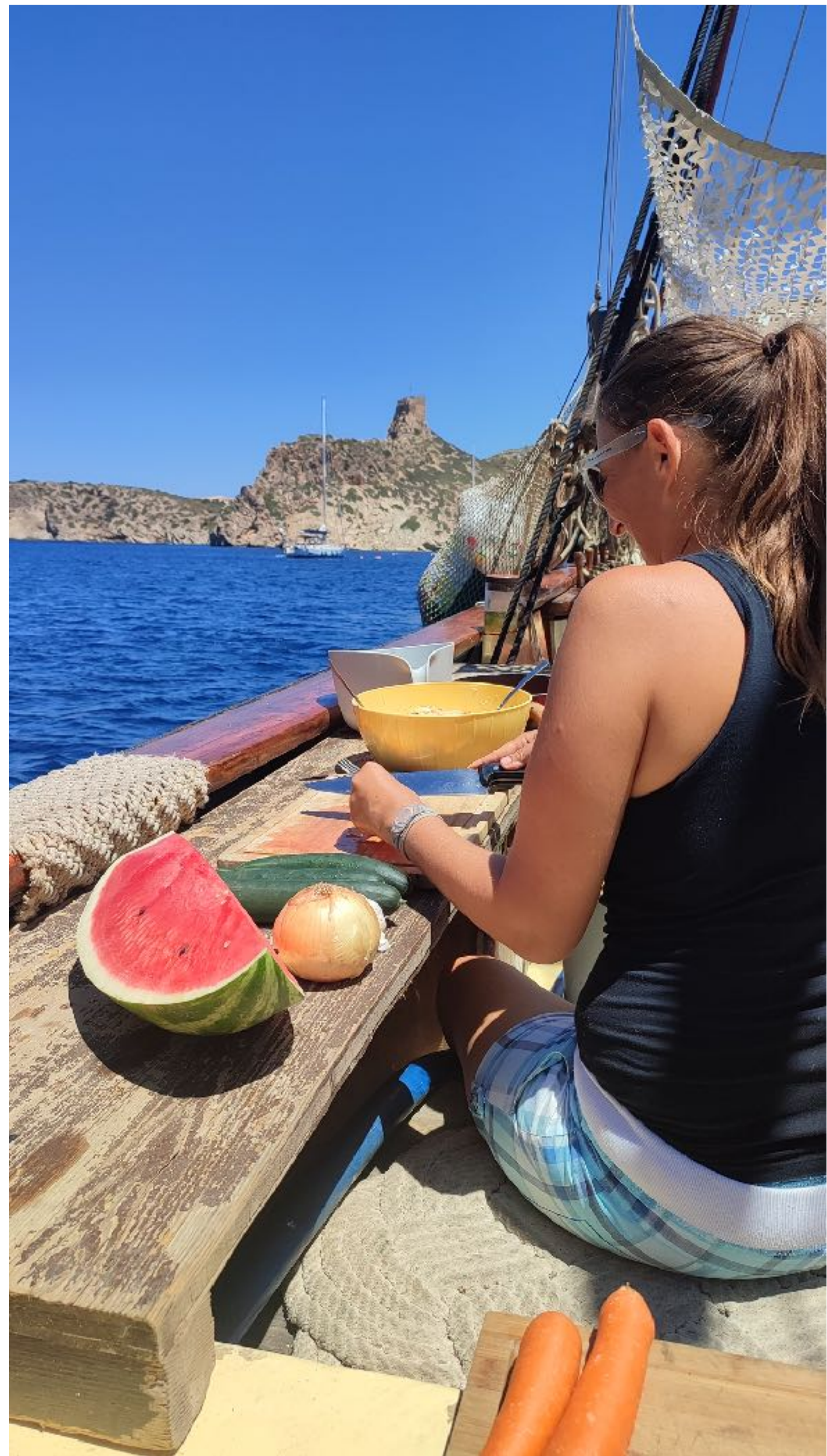
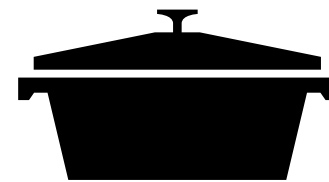
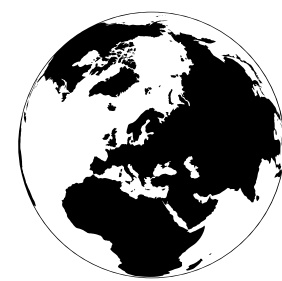
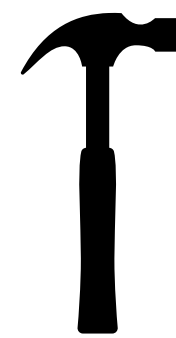
- 1) Visit our alnitak.org website
- 2) Click on “Get Involved - Join the crew as volunteer”
- 3) Fill out and submit the online application
- 4) Make the deposit

...and you're done! You will receive an email from us within 48 hours.

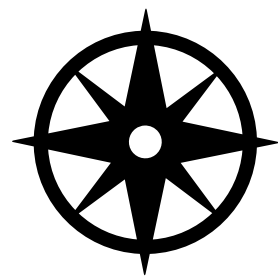
Closer to the Expedition date you will receive a BRIEFING document with further details as well as a check-list of appropriate things to pack, and other information to enhance your experience as well as our policy which are important documents to read through. You will also be asked to fill in online forms regarding diet, health information, etc. so everything is ready pre-departure.



Our email: info@alnitak.org



Coming on board *Toftevaag* is embracing a wondrous adventure in a beautiful, but often harsh environment. Volunteers who come on board contribute to ongoing projects by becoming part of a working team, which sometimes entails waking up early, long survey days and some physical exertion. However, this makes it fully immersive. You effectively become a deckhand and learn from hands-on experiences.





An expedition consists of:

- * 11 days (10 nights) living and working on board. Typical ratio is 2 crew - 4 volunteers. There are 12 bunk beds in total divided in three shared cabins, but this way we will be extremely comfortable!
- * An economic contribution of 1100 EUROS from the volunteer to cover costs while on board plus supporting the scientific programs.
- * Sailing when conditions allow us to.
- * Full safety briefings and training in sailing manoeuvres.
- * Upon signing up you will receive a BRIEFING document with further details as well as a check-list of appropriate things to pack, and other information to enhance your experience.

Frequently Asked Questions

How is Alnitak committed to my safety?

Risk is an inherent part of our work. Which is why volunteers are given a safety briefing upon embarking and project staff are trained in appropriate emergency response procedures. If needed and despite sailing in open waters, we can typically get a helicopter in under 30 minutes for a quick transfer to hospital.

Do I need to have any prior sailing knowledge?

No, you will be taught everything you need to know on board. Part of the immersive experience is to partake directly in sailing manoeuvres.

What kind of physical shape do I need to be in?

Most volunteers are able to embark, and we have had volunteers aged 80+. However, prepare for long days at sea. These expeditions are no pleasure cruise, and there is a “rough and tough” aspect when living on Toftevaag.

What is included in the cost of my contribution?

When you join, you do more than contribute your valuable time and effort. Your contribution is also vital to help cover project costs, crew, locally sourced food, and other key expenses which get us out of the port and into the open sea.

Can I travel alone?

Yes! One of the great thing about Alnitak expeditions is that you get thrown in with a community of like-minded adventurers who have signed up to make a tangible contribution to marine conservation.

How old do you have to be to volunteer?

Some volunteer opportunities will require a minimum age of 18 although on occasions we taken on volunteers of at least 16 years of age. Volunteers under the under the age of 18 must send along a signed Permission Form by a parent/guardian in order to participate.