

Maine Maritime Academy *NEWS*



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MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY SCHOONER BOWDOIN TO RETURN TO THE ARCTIC

CASTINE, Maine -- Maine Maritime Academy's schooner [*Bowdoin*](#) will sail to the Arctic Circle this summer, recalling the vessel's historic roots in Arctic exploration and research while providing a unique setting for traditional sail training. Students sailing aboard the *Bowdoin* to the Arctic will retrace the vessel's historic routes while learning the fundamentals of ocean voyaging, from pre-voyage planning and provisioning, to hands-on sailing and navigation.

The intrepid trip north is a familiar venture for Maine Maritime Academy. Soon after acquiring the vessel in 1988, the college sponsored two similar seafaring adventures to the Arctic, the vessel's first voyages to the North since the 1950s. Inspired by a nostalgic look to the vessel's cold-weather design and construction and its historic role as an educational platform for students, MMA planned sail training trips that took students to Nain, Labrador, in 1990, and 150

miles north of the Arctic Circle to Disko Island, Greenland, in 1991 aboard the *Bowdoin*. Another trip to the Arctic was completed in 1994.

Built in 1921 at the Hodgdon Brothers Shipyard in East Boothbay, now [Hodgdon Yachts, Inc.](#), the *Bowdoin* made 25 scientific expeditions to the Arctic Circle under the scientific and seafaring leadership of Adm. Donald MacMillan prior to the vessel's withdrawal from Arctic service in 1954. During that time, *Bowdoin* sailed 28 degrees north of the Arctic Circle, and wintered over four times in the region while frozen in ice. MacMillan became internationally known for his explorations in the far north and received Hubbard Gold Medal of the National Geographic Society in 1953. He was also well-known for his inclusion of high school age students in his epic expeditions

In keeping with the vessel's student-centered history, this year's voyage will provide a unique opportunity for 13 students to experience real-life, hands-on sailing, to a remote corner of the world. Students will also experience the necessary preparatory work leading up to such a significant and challenging voyage. The twelve-week course is scheduled to begin May 5 in port in Castine, with the vessel tentatively scheduled to get underway on June 1 for a 60-day voyage. According to Captain Rick Miller, this year's sail training cruise will retrace courses and revisit ports-of-call made by previous *Bowdoin* trips north.

This year's voyage plan will also utilize traditional schedules and routing to successfully navigate the frigid waters and ice hazards. *Bowdoin* will venture as far north as Jacobshaven, Greenland, a small village located southeast of Disko Island at approximately 70 degrees latitude. Other traditional *Bowdoin* port visits are planned for the towns of Nuuk and Sisimiut in Greenland.

With plans in place to set sail no later than June 1, Miller hopes to get underway earlier if the boat and crew are ready, possibly May 29. Once underway, he plans a one-week voyage to St. John's, Newfoundland. Upon departure from St. John's, the *Bowdoin* will sail due east. "This will take us across 'ice berg alley' and into clear water," said Miller. "Then we'll sail north along the 50th west meridian." Upon reaching Jacobshaven and viewing the Jacobshaven Glacier, *Bowdoin* will make a southerly return, crossing the Davis Strait to the coast of Labrador. This crossing plan will rely heavily on the crew's assessment of ice flow conditions in the area at the time. Conditions permitting, Battle Harbour, a restored 19th century fishing village located on a

small island in the Labrador Sea will be the next port on the itinerary. The village is accessible only by boat and air from mid-June through late September.

After transiting the Strait of Belle Isle from Labrador to Newfoundland, *Bowdoin* will sail the Gulf of St. Lawrence and make a traditional passage via the Bras d'Or Lakes. An alternate route would take the schooner south of Cape Breton and involve a stop in Louisburg. Crew members are also investigating the possibility of a stop at Sable Island, a narrow, crescent-shaped sand bar island located at the edge of the continental shelf. The island is located at the intersection of the Labrador current and the northern extremes of the Gulf Stream. The island is widely reputed for its natural beauty and for the presence of feral horses. The *Bowdoin* is due to return to Castine on Saturday, July 31.

The course, entitled *Auxiliary Sail – Ocean Voyaging*, is a more intense version of a regular experiential learning opportunity offered at MMA each summer. This year's training cruise also contrasts from other ones in that it was initiated and planned by students. Student-based, from conception to execution, Miller said that the ambitious schedule and itinerary has been brought about by the vision, enthusiasm, and persistence of several students who first approached him with the idea nearly one year ago. "Recent trips have ventured to the Canadian maritime provinces and as far south as Virginia, but this group wanted to see the *Bowdoin* re-sail her past," he said. "I supported their idea by reminding them that a focus of their learning at MMA is experiential. I encouraged them to look at their idea as a way to begin to discover how to make things happen, how to propose a solution rather than a problem, and take responsibility for one's own learning. In typical Maine Maritime Academy fashion, they did just that and they should be very proud of their voyage plan. It's a significant accomplishment with many more to follow."

The sail training course serves as an introduction to the overall maintenance and operations of a large, traditional sailing vessel. Sponsored annually by Maine Maritime Academy's William F. Thompson School of Marine Transportation in support of an academic concentration in Sail Training, the course is designed for students with little or no prior sailing or boating experience. The program begins the first week in May with nautical activities based at the college's waterfront facilities. Students enrolled in the course participate in painting, rigging, cleaning, engineering, voyage planning, and provisioning. Students also work with the vessel's

professional steward in a rotating schedule. They learn to cook and prepare the day's meals, clean the food preparation area, and conduct provisioning and menu planning for the voyage.

Miller noted that this year's preparatory month in port will continue to focus on routine maintenance but will also include the installation of additional and refitted equipment in anticipation of weather challenges during the voyage. For example, *Bowdoin's* regular tender and rescue boat, a rigid hull inflatable (RHI) boat, will be replaced with a new RHI. Donated by the Cruising Club of America's Bonnell Cove Foundation, the new boat is slightly larger than the previous one and is outfitted with a new, more powerful outboard motor. Also, *Bowdoin* will sail with a new main boom this season, a cooperative effort of Hodgdon Yachts, Inc., and students enrolled in the college's small vessel operations program. Hodgdon Yachts crafted and donated an unfinished laminated boom, and students will complete the turning and finishing process next month on campus as part of a small craft construction class.

As in past years, students will live in Maine Maritime Academy dormitory-style housing as an introduction to living in semi-close quarters. Beginning in late May, students will begin living aboard the vessel in preparation for the northern sail training expedition. Once underway, cruising experiences will include watchstanding, navigation techniques, underway maintenance, and seamanship. All activities will take place under the direction of professionally licensed seafarers.

The historic schooner's port visits also serve to inform the public about Maine Maritime Academy and enables the *Bowdoin*, the official vessel of the State of Maine, to offer outreach on traditional sail training techniques, the seafaring heritage of Maine, and the value of experiential learning.

MMA's schooner *Bowdoin* will continue a very busy [summer schedule](#) following the completion of the Arctic training cruise. As the flagship of the college's small vessel operations (SVO) program and a traditional sail ambassador for the college and the state, the *Bowdoin* is scheduled to offer multiple sail training experiences for MMA students. On August 2, the *Bowdoin* will embark on another sail training trip, this time heading to Nova Scotia, Canada. The trip will provide a platform for a senior student capstone project under sail. A third sail training trip will be offered later in the summer due to an increased popularity of the college's program. The trip will sail to Nova Scotia, Canada, from August 16 to August 29.

The *Bowdoin*, a national historic landmark and Maine's official sailing, supported the

educational initiatives of Mystic Seaport in Connecticut and the Outward Bound School in Maine vessel following withdrawal from Arctic service. The schooner was later acquired by the Schooner *Bowdoin* Association. Maine Maritime Academy leased the vessel in 1988 and bought her outright a year later.

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