

# **Sailing to Where the Sun Goes Sideways**

**The Voyage of Mina<sup>2</sup> to the Lofoten Islands  
June – September 2004**



**Tim Barker**

This journal is, in part, a photographic diary of our trip to the Lofoten Islands and down the coast of Norway in the summer of 2004, part log, and part a pilot of the area, which I hope will be of benefit to those who follow.

My thanks to all my guests on the cruise for their help and, without whom, it would all have been very lonely:

Colin Andrews  
Tom Mallaburn  
Richard Close-Smith  
Venetia Kenny-Herbert  
Christopher Taylor-Young  
David Fisher  
Hugh & Noel Barker  
Peter Barker  
Nigel & Jane Fawkes  
Nick & Jenny Hartley  
Charles Gotto  
Richard Gaunt  
Lawrence Wells

My thanks also to John Minton who had Mina<sup>2</sup> (then Stealer V) built to an incredibly high specification and who has thrown down the gauntlet by telling me that if I want to beat his record I have to wind her up to 13+ knots; John Duff who brought “Arethusa of Lymington” up to the Lofoten Islands two years ago and who provided me with much advice. And, not least, to Maria who has tolerated my single-minded obsession with the dream for ten years, helped enormously with the preparation and who allowed me three months off (which, she tells me, none of my friends would have got away with).

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# **Sailing to Where the Sun Goes Sideways**

## **The Voyage of Mina<sup>2</sup> to the Lofoten Islands June – September 2004**

**1550 UTC 07 June 2004. 52°02'N 001°47'E (10 miles off Aldburgh)**

After the years of dreaming and the months of planning, Mina<sup>2</sup> and her intrepid crew quietly slipped her moorings outside St Katherine Docks in the heart of London at 0245 UTC this morning bound for Shetland - the first of the two legs to the Lofoten Islands in the Arctic Circle. Having managed to recommission the boat after a nightmare seven-month refit during which almost everything went badly wrong, Mina<sup>2</sup> has been in London for a couple of weeks. The partying was over and we were ready to go. Tom Mallaburn and Colin Andrews joined the boat yesterday evening, and Maria, my long-suffering wife, and my daughter Selina bade their farewells as we locked out of the dock.

It would be consistent with the spirit of adventure that I had envisaged to report to you that we are now rounding up into the North Sea into the teeth of a nor'easterly gale; shouldering our way heroically into mountainous seas.

The fact is that we have had the engine on since we left the mooring, apart from one hour when we turned it off so we could better enjoy the delicious lunch prepared by Tom Mallaburn. The water is as flat as a millpond and the sun is shining, so a peaceful start to our voyage and Colin Andrews has yet to discover whether or not he is seasick (I only discovered a couple of weeks ago that he has no sailing experience at all and this four-day trip is, for him, some masochistic experiment - typical).



**Leaving London at dawn**

Maria has worked like a slave over the last few days provisioning the boat, so even if we run out of fuel and drift in tropical conditions for weeks, we are unlikely to starve (nor die of thirst with more than 150 litres of wine on board and a similar quantity of beer!), but hopefully I will be able to report some more favourable sailing conditions in due course.

**8 June 0600: 53 °34'N 001°35'E.**

So at last the once in a hundred year phenomenon of Venus's transit of the Sun has arrived. Doing our best to suppress our excitement, out comes the sextant, perfect for the observation. Yes! the sun has a tiny spot on it. Ten minutes later, the sun still had a tiny spot on it. Another ten minutes and, yes, the spot was still there. Riveting stuff and well worth the hundred year wait. Thank goodness the sun had the decency to go behind a cloud otherwise we would have been glued to that spot for six hours. Certainly something to tell the grandchildren!



**Tom sights Venus's transit of the Sun**

**9 June 2004 0500: 56°18'N 001°12'E (about 110 miles offshore and just north of Edinburgh)**

I had not intended writing a further update until we arrived at Shetland - the half way point to our destination, after all we were expecting a comparatively dull passage. However..... having started the passage with absolutely no wind, we motored for 21 hours non-stop until 0200 yesterday morning. I had serious concerns that we were going to have to motor all the way to Shetland and we would have to dive in somewhere to top up our diesel. I needed have no such concerns. The shipping forecasts suddenly started forecasting SE veering SW Force 4 or 5 occasionally 6. Just what we needed and just what we got. We started romping along for hour after hour, breeze on the starboard quarter and doing between 7½ to 9½ knots. Great. We enjoyed the aerobatics of the fulmars; I saw my first puffin and we spotted a dolphin - albeit fleetingly. Things could not be better.

At about 1800 yesterday afternoon, we noticed dark clouds gathering from the south west. The mainland had been enjoying hot, humid weather and “occasional thundery showers” had been forecast. We started seeing distant lightning and we heard the first rumblings of thunder. Within a short time the wind was picking up to the promised Force 6, and we rolled up one of our two headsails and put quite a deep reef in the mainsail. We donned full heavy weather gear - and just as well. By 1900 we were surrounded by a violent thunder storm which lasted five hours until midnight. There was almost constant brilliant lightning all around us accompanied by thunder ranging from distant rumblings to earth-shattering claps directly overhead.



**Nervous smiles from the crew as the storm approaches**

We were surrounded by enormous forces looking for a good lightning conductor such as a 70 foot metal mast. The only boat for miles, it was inevitable, I thought, that we would be struck and I simply waited for the moment to come. What would it be like? Would our ear drums implode with agonising pain? Would our eyes get blown out of their sockets? Would our brains be fried, and would any of us notice the difference? I put the mobile VHF and a handheld GPS in the oven to act as a protecting Faraday cage as, notwithstanding our well-earthed lightning conductor at the top of the mast, I feared there was a good probability that our electronics would be fried. We were hand steering, as the autopilot was having some difficulty in coping with quartering waves knocking the stern sideways. It occurred to me that the steering wheel had a metal connection through the cables, quadrant etc, straight into the excellent earthing properties of the sea. Having one's hands gripped to the wheel was probably not the smartest idea, so I promptly gave the helm to Colin. In the thick of the storm, not only did we have the pyrotechnic display of the lightning all around with accompanying sound effects, but we were swept by squalls. Rain so torrential - really tropical - it flattened the steepening seas. The wind was now blowing a full gale and, during the squalls which lasted up to half an hour, we had gusts of severe gale (Force 9). The highest wind speed we recorded was 48 knots.

Throughout it all Mina<sup>2</sup> behaved impeccably. Beautifully balanced, she was hammering along at 10 knots plus. It was exhilarating, and the waves certainly gave



Colin the opportunity to see whether he suffered from seasickness. Tom and I were more than relieved to find he passed his first test! In all, the storm lasted about six hours. Everything has now quietened down, and the crew are drying out and catching up on lost sleep.

Certainly a passage with dramatically different components.



**Tom pretending to be gritty!**

Just before the storm, and not having seen another vessel since we left the Thames estuary, we saw in the distance the distinctive yellow sails and tall mast of one of the Challenge yachts charging towards us, well reefed, swathed in spray and looking as heroic as if they were rounding the Horn. Taking part in the Round Britain and Ireland Race, the crew were all lined up on the windward rail, legs dangling over the side (how that takes me back, but I have to say I was happier sitting in the cockpit with a glass of wine in my hand!). We passed half a cable away and were treated to a synchronised and enthusiastic wave from the crew. Given the dearth of other vessels we had encountered, we were probably the first boat they had seen in two weeks! [Reading the logs of some of the Challenge boats on my return, some found this storm to be something of a survival exercise.]

### **13 June – Lerwick, Shetland Isles**

Well, we arrived in Lerwick, Shetland Islands at 11pm on Thursday. Our arrival caused quite a stir and, indeed, was announced on Shetland radio. I like to think the interest was because they rarely see such a magnificent yacht here, but it may have had more to do with the fact we were towed in by the Shetland lifeboat.

At 0800 we were 60 miles SSE of Lerwick. We had been motoring for a couple of hours. The sea was flat, the sun was warm, and our 600 mile journey was almost completed. To celebrate our achievement, we popped a bottle of champagne. A mistake. Barely had the last sip of the bubbling nectar slipped down our throats, than the engine died. I changed the fuel filter as a precaution, bled the engine and managed to get it going again for 20 minutes, when it died once more. At 1100 I

radioed the Shetland Coastguard to advise them of our position and our situation, and at their request we reported in every two hours. Apart from the concerns about the engine (and that the new generator had packed up AGAIN) everything was near perfect. We were sailing again with the cruising chute up (a type of spinnaker). A school of about eight dolphins - including a mother with her little pup close behind, learning the tricks - had come to check us out and obligingly put on a spectacular display for us - shooting under the boat and, in pairs, leaping out of the water on the other side.

At 2100, still with no joy in getting the engine going, I reported to the Coastguard again. We were now only 10 miles from Lerwick with the bottom of Shetland clearly in sight on our port beam. The Coastguard said they would like to send the lifeboat out to tow us in the last bit, as someone would be needed to get us into the harbour anyway, and better now than in the middle of the night. Just as well as, at that point, the wind died completely and the tide was slowly setting us towards the rocky shore. I rigged a sturdy yoke round the winches, mast and cleats, using the windlass to tighten it. (I was later told that the lifeboatmen were impressed by this preparation - apparently they almost always have to put a man on board to do this). The tow went smoothly and the lifeboat docked us at Albert Dock.

After all the excitement, we were disappointed that our arrival was a few minutes after 11pm and the pubs would be shut. Och, not in Shetland, said the lifeboatmen. This is the land of hard drinkers. Here the bars don't shut until 1am. So we joined the lifeboatmen in a harbourside bar where the drinks flowed freely until we were eventually kicked out.



**Shetland lifeboat to the rescue – apparently they were impressed with our pre-prepared yoke!**

The lifeboatmen includes the most decorated lifeboat coxswain in the country, Hewitt Clark, who appeared on This Is Your Life - one of the most unassuming blokes you could hope to meet. The lifeboat crew have invited me to join them on

Sunday for their weekly exercise, which I am really looking forward to. All the Shetlanders are incredibly friendly - everyone had heard of our arrival and we have had a constant stream of visitors coming to say hello and enquire whether our problems had been solved.

Mark, a marine engineer, took up residence on the boat for a day and a half and eventually found the problem - a bit of paper rag had jammed in the primary fuel filter (and wrecked it in the process). A disaster waiting to happen, so just as well it manifested itself in such benign conditions relatively close to a safe haven. Questions will be asked.

So the engine has been fixed and we now have additional failsafe filters in case another bit of rag appears. The Whispergen has been fixed, although I frankly have very little confidence that it will become reliable. The SSB email (which had stopped working half way up the North Sea) is now working again and we are ready to continue the next long leg into the Arctic Circle, starting Monday pm.

Although I have spent most of my time in Shetland with my head in the engine room, we did manage to get out yesterday afternoon on another hot and sunny day for a wonderful walk on the west coast overlooking all the offshore islands. The birdlife is fantastic here; we saw amongst many others a pair of Osprey and a Northern Wheatear. Colin took his collapsible fly rod and fished a loch on the way back but, sadly, no dinner was forthcoming.



**Colin identifies a rare orchid ...**



**and tries to catch our dinner**

I was sad to see Colin and Tom leave this morning at the end of their stint; we have been through interesting times together and, storms and mechanical failures aside, it has been fantastic. I now await the arrival of Venetia and Richard to continue the passage.

**14 June.** Yesterday I went out on the Shetland lifeboat for their weekly exercise. An amazing experience. The lifeboat has twin Caterpillar engines, each producing 1250 horsepower. Consuming 400 litres of diesel an hour it travels at 25 knots almost regardless of sea conditions. The range is about 110 miles out of port. When the waves are high you just bounce around a lot, strapped to your pneumatic seat like a jet pilot.





### **The Shetland lifeboat**

**In one rescue they crammed 113 survivors on board – only three were lost**

The RNLI have developed a remarkable vessel, evolved over many decades of experience. Almost everything has been thought of. It is self-righting in seven seconds in the event of a roll-over – but I bet it seems longer at the time as you bounce off the deckhead! If they have a bad injury on board they have everything to hand except a defibrillator. For back injuries, they strap the victim to a stretcher, put the trim tabs right down and the boat, rather than planing on the waves, simply ploughs through them with very little motion.

But the most impressive thing was the extraordinary professionalism and bravery of the crew. I was surrounded by unassuming individuals – butchers and mechanics as well as fishermen, many of whom had been awarded RNLI medals (rare as hens' teeth) for rescues of lives in the most appalling conditions. Back in the lifeboat office they had photographs of some of their missions in which one can only get a feel for the truly terrifying conditions in which these men volunteer to go out. Real-life heroes in everyone's eyes except their own. It was a great privilege to know them.

However, I was to get to know some of them better than I thought. I offered an open invitation for them to come on board *Mina*<sup>2</sup> for a drink. After lunch some of them turned up bearing a bottle of a disgustingly sweet vodka based drink called "Jago" that tastes of ice cream. This is a local product of which they are inordinately proud. By the time the bottle (and many accompanying cans of lager) had been finished, it was clear that the lifeboat crew had adopted me as some kind of a mascot and they were not going to let me go. The Viking blood of the Shetlanders manifests itself in an extraordinary capacity to drink vast quantities of alcohol – and they were determined to show me how they have good time. So the pub crawl started, and I was an essential ingredient. As we went from one bar to the next, I had to go through the repeated embarrassment of being introduced to everyone as the pillock who had to have his yacht towed in by them. I lost count of the number of bars we visited – there seemed to be an endless supply all within about a hundred yards of the waterfront. Eventually, about 8pm I think, the wife of one decided that it was time they returned to the bosoms of their families to sleep it off. After embracing me and swearing

eternal friendship, they all piled into her car. I too was in desperate need of sleep, and how I managed to get back on the boat down 20 feet of harbour wall I don't recall. No sooner had my eyes closed than there was a rap on the window, and there was the rest of the lifeboat crew, with another bottle of Jago, determined to give a repeat performance of the Shetlanders wonderful hospitality. What a bunch!

So this morning, to say that I had a hangover would be a bit of an understatement. But I had to be up early to welcome Venetia off the ferry. Richard arrived by plane after lunch and having refuelled and re-watered we were off to Lofoten.

**1000 UTC 16 June 2004. 64°03'N 005°13'E (about 125 miles north west of Trondheim).**

Now more than half way from the Shetlands to Lofoten and only 140 miles before we enter the Arctic Circle. Richard and Venetia, both members of the Royal Cruising Club, are brimming with experience (Venetia once raced to the Azores and back - single handed). The forecast was NW Force 5 to 7, perfect for our NE passage. The wind got to Force 7 (near gale) by midnight on Monday and we were screaming along at 9 to 10 knots (at one point we peaked at 12.4 knots). The wind continued to rise to a full gale (the maximum wind speed we recorded over the deck was 45 knots - about 50 miles per hour) Over the next 24 hours we travelled 194 miles and that, believe me, is fast. We would have achieved the cruising boat's Holy Grail of 200 miles per day except that due to the beating we were taking from the now mountainous and breaking seas, we had to reef right down and slow the boat. We also had to stop the boat entirely for half an hour (by heaving to) to lash the dinghy which was becoming detached from its davits (a stainless steel wire holding it up had severed after a wave smashed into it). Thank God Fox's had delivered the backup webbing straps the day before we left London or we would have lost the dinghy entirely.



**Heaving to in the gale to rescue the dinghy**

Our danbuoy (man overboard flag) was also swept away complete with its holder, as was our boat hook, by the waves which were continuously sweeping the decks in dramatic fashion. Later, we carried out an impromptu man-overboard drill when the last remaining boathook was also swept over, Venetia hanging upside down over the side of the boat recovering the pole whilst Richard manoeuvred the boat into position - highly-skilled work in these conditions.

After more than 30 hours being raked by gale-force winds, the wind has now abated a little so life is becoming a little more civilised again. I, for instance, can type this email - a couple of hours ago the laptop was self-launching off the chart table. The sun is now out, and we are still clipping along at more than 8 knots. Wonderful!

**17 June.** The time is now 9.30pm BST, the sun is high in the sky and we crossed into the Arctic Circle ten minutes ago having had an excellent dinner of steak from the freezer. We are clipping along at 8 knots on a fetch (not quite into the wind) with just 88 miles to go to the bottom of the Lofoten Islands. Last night I had the midnight to 3 am watch and was reading in the cockpit throughout, without any difficulty. Tonight I will need sunglasses! Having sailed more than 1200 miles to get here it seems as if we have almost arrived. The 30 hours of gale force is a receding memory with nothing but the bruises, the beaten up dinghy and davit, and one or two absent pieces of equipment to remind us. Conditions like those expose even the tiniest weaknesses in a boat and overall Mina<sup>2</sup> came through with flying colours. She performed brilliantly during the gale; beautifully balanced throughout, shouldering her way determinedly over the waves giving us as comfortable a ride as conditions could allow. The automatic pilot did virtually all of the driving with no difficulties at all. It is a credit to her build that despite the continuous raking of her decks by solid water, down below she was completely dry.

The weather is now generally sunny interspersed with clouds. Out of the wind the sun is warm. In the wind it is bitterly cold, and on deck we are fully toggged up with thermals, gloves, woolly hats etc. Can everyone please STOP sending us emails about 29 degree heat in England!

We arrive in the Lofoten Islands tomorrow afternoon and Richard and Venetia leave on Monday at lunchtime. They have devised an itinerary which seemingly covers the entire coastline in 2½ days - no time for relaxation!

**20 June.** At last, we arrived in the Lofoten Islands at Å (pronounced “or”) (67°52.8'N 012°59.3'E) at 1500 BST on Friday, a smidgeon under four days since we left Lerwick. The final conditions were ideal, Force 3/4 NW on the beam; flat water (at last) and the cruising chute up doing 6 knots. The sun was out and all was well with the world.



**Civilised sailing at last**

John Duff, who brought "Arethusa of Lymington" up here a couple of years ago, and who provided me with a lot of advice in preparation for this exercise, said that the scenery was so dramatic that sometimes you couldn't believe it wasn't a Disney creation. The last thing he said to me was "Tim, I envy you your trip". Now I know why. I had exceedingly high expectations when I was planning the trip. Those expectations have been blown away. It is just indescribably wonderful up here and we seem to have it all to ourselves. We saw another boat on Saturday, and another small local boat today (Sunday) and that has been it. So finding places to moor or anchor is not a problem!



**Lofoten landscape at Reine**

Yesterday we started the gruelling "See the Lofotens in 2½ days" itinerary set by Richard and we have so far covered seven little harbours or anchorages. I am looking forward to returning to some of these and exploring them in a little more depth!



### **Mina<sup>2</sup> at Aesoya – one of the lovely anchorages of Lofoten**

Richard very kindly bought the boat some cod fishing gear and we had no sooner left the harbour when Venetia said "Look, there's a local fishing boat pulling in a fish. Let's get the line down". I explained to her as patiently as I could that I knew about these things and you had to fish in 10 to 30m of water. We were in 80m. It would be a complete waste of time. Not one to take any notice of negative-minded skippers, Venetia let out the full scope of the line. Within two minutes there were hysterical girly squeals and Venetia had a look of excitement and fear on her face. "I think I've got something!" Now, I've caught a few mackerel from the boat in my time and I know that fish put up a spirited struggle. The pathetic tugs on the line this time promised no more than a bit of whitebait for dinner. So there was some surprise when a whopping saithe (coley) suddenly appeared.





**Richard hacks off the head .....**

**..... leaving Venetia with what's left**

I think it was about 24 inches long. It would have been nice to have measured it but it was barely out of the water before Richard had hacked its head off (his preferred method of dispatching fish over the "death-by-winch handle" conventional approach). It was somewhat macabre when with the severed head in his hand, the mouth was continuing to open and shut, as if trying to reproach Richard for his brutal attack. Filleted, it provided a more than ample meal for the three of us, cooked by Venetia in an excellent white wine sauce.

Whilst in Reine yesterday (67°56'N 013°04'E), in one of the most spectacular surroundings in Lofoten, Richard shot off in his shorts and sailing shoes to climb the massive mountain overlooking the harbour. I stayed on the boat and was a little concerned to read in a guide book that this particular ascent was hard by most standards; it should only be attempted by experienced mountaineers and would take several hours to complete. When Richard returned just an hour and half later I said "Never mind, Richard, there are some challenges that are beyond even you". "Bollocks to that" he said and produced his digital camera with a picture of him at the top, and one looking down on the harbour! As if that exercise was not enough for him, both Richard and Venetia have been brilliant at sorting out all sorts of things on the boat including post-storm repairs like a refashioned ensign staff (Richard); a restitched yankee sail (Venetia), (almost) repaired davit (Richard and Venetia). The latter involved some improvisation and Maria will find that her nylon chopping board has a large bit hacked out of it. Shining fenders (Venetia): the list goes on and on and a very fine example for crew yet to join Mina<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, I have had the onerous task of typing all these update emails. One point of extreme irritation is that the blasted Whispergen has packed up yet again, so until they come up here to sort it out, we are having to run the engine for up to four hours a day - it was precisely to avoid this that I paid a fortune for an apparently useless bit of kit.

We have been dead lucky with the weather so far. Apparently the Lofoten Islands had been getting the same weather as we had on the way here - high winds, cold, rain etc for about three weeks. But since we arrived, it has been brilliantly sunny. The air is still cold, so in a breeze you have to have a couple of layers on but, out of the breeze, it is really, genuinely shorts and T-shirt weather. Indeed this morning we even had breakfast in the cockpit with just shirt sleeves - who would have thought we were in the arctic!



**Richard proving the point!**

The weather seems to clear when the wind comes from the east. On those days visibility is crystal clear and, looking south, you clearly see the peaks and glaciers of the mainland - more than 60 miles away. That is the equivalent of standing at the Needles and seeing the Cherbourg peninsula! Tomorrow is the longest day, and it does feel very strange going to bed at about 1am with the sun still shining on the snow clad mountains behind. One has to get out of the habit of saying “We must try and reach port before dark” – it would be a long wait!

#### **Gastronomic note:**

At the excellent but extortionately expensive restaurant (£30 for a 75cl jug of plonk) in Henningsvaer we sampled a variety of Norwegian specialities such as cods’ tongues, carpaccio of whale, stockfish (dried cod) and smoked goat. All absolutely delicious although where the goats come from, I don’t know – I haven’t seen any. Henningsvaer is a lovely spot (68°09.2'N 014°12.2'E) but its description as “The Venice of the Lofotens” is somewhat exaggerated.



### **Henningsvaer – The Venice of the Lofotens!**

**30 June.** So Richard and Venetia have left – Venetia leaving one of her excellent stews and the last of her divine fruit cake as a brief memorial for Christopher Taylor-Young and David Fisher to enjoy. Christopher and David are both ex-colleagues. It was Christopher who indirectly made the dream come true; it was his company that I joined in 1996 and helped grow, then sell – the proceeds from which have made it all possible. I owe him a great debt of gratitude. Christopher is 70 and David the same age as me (52). You might have confused the two – Christopher was dashing about the boat with fenders and warps, leaping onto pontoons to tie us up, and then instigating long walks across rough terrain. David (who had clearly not read any of my briefing emails and arrived, as at a hotel, with no pillow cases, sheets or towel) was, shall we say, less agile. It is just as well he was not on board for the hairy Shetland-Lofoten passage which was his original intention – he might have found he had bitten off more than he could chew!

Christopher and David joined on the longest day of the year, 21 June, when the sun was at its highest. We spent the night in Svolvær (68°14'N 014°34'E), the capital of the Lofoten Islands. Surrounded by mountains, we could only see the sun indirectly, reflected on the majestic mountains surrounding us. High above us, we saw two mountaineers right at the top of the “Svolvaergeita” – the goats horn pinnacles at the top of an almost vertical cliff face overlooking Svolvær – the greatest challenge being to jump from one pinnacle to the other. What a place to spend midnight looking at the sun on the longest day of the year!



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### **Jumping the goat's horns, with Svolvær below**

The following morning, we awoke to the sound of heavy and persistent rain – not an auspicious start to their week on the boat but, in the event, this turned out to be the only rain during the week. The days seem to alternate between a couple of overcast days, followed by a day or two of brilliant sunshine. Whilst the sun is hot if you are out of the wind, the air is cold and in the wind you need a layer or three (or, in David's case, five layers, a balaclava and gloves, full heavy weather gear and, even then, no more than 10 minutes at the helm before disappearing down below to warm up!).



**Not all the days are sunny**

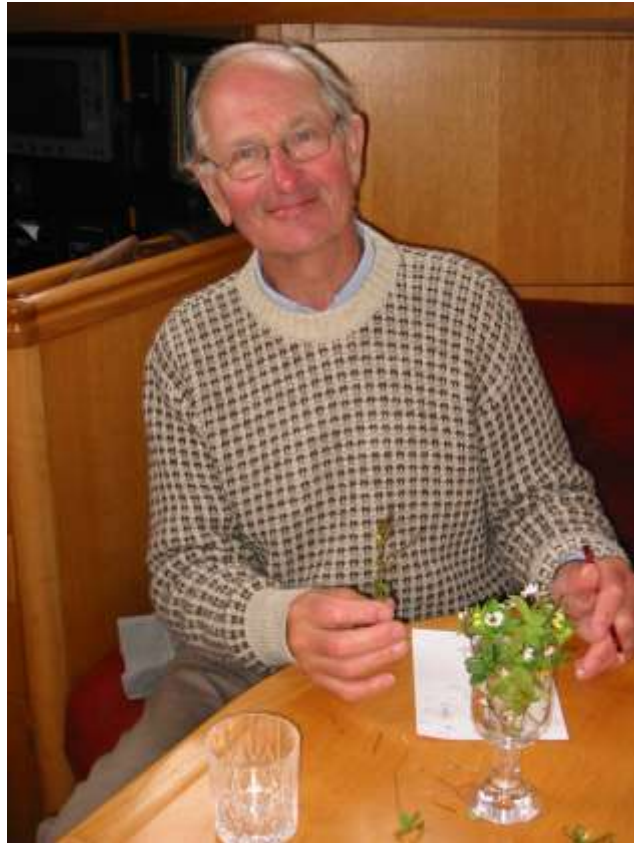
A couple of days later we spent the night at the delightful fishing village of Mortsund (68°05'N 013°38.5'E). Most of the harbours here are working fishing harbours but, notwithstanding the paucity of visiting boats, most make some provision for visiting yachts. One of the charms of Mortsund was that there was no pretence to make any accommodation for anything other than working fishing boats, and this gave the place an authentic charm (albeit a somewhat athletic climb to the quay side up a rusting and lopsided ladder – David clinging to it for dear life whilst I held the boat three inches from the ladder so he didn't have too big a chasm to jump). On our arrival some Germans, who were staying a few days in a rorbu (fishermans cottage), appeared with some disgusting sweet wine and a bottle of rather more fortifying Schnapps to welcome us. We produced a bottle of whisky and an impromptu party ensued. The Germans were insistent that this, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, was the longest night. As we had not been in a position to witness the midnight sun on the 21<sup>st</sup>, and Mortsund had a clear view north, Christopher and I went to the top of a small hill to witness it (David, who was having vapours at the thought of another ascent up the rusty ladder, had decided to stay on board). Whilst the sky was clear there was some cloud stretching along the horizon just below the sun. We rushed up the hill to catch the sun before it dipped below the cloud but, having got there, we realized that here the sun doesn't go down but just tracks sideways – an odd phenomenon. And I still haven't got used to sitting in the cockpit in broad daylight looking at the sun on the mountains behind at 2am.



**The midnight sun tracking sideways at Mortsund - this is as low as it gets**

Christopher, like Colin before him, is something of a bird and plant expert and it was a great education having him around to point out all the numerous varieties. I am rapidly turning into a “twitcher” differentiating at ease between Guillemots and Black Guillemots, and Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls from the colour of their legs. We went on a couple of challenging and beautiful walks up hills around the coast. The hills were a riot of colour with innumerable wild flowers including thousands of orchids. Delightful. At one turn of a hill, we confronted a Ptarmigan with three chicks. Whether or not they eat them here I don't know.





**Christopher preparing his botanical field notes**

Some days there was insufficient wind to do much in the way of sailing but, with the still unreliable Whispergen, we needed to have the engine running anyway. Later in the week, we got a couple of days with good winds and both Christopher and David enjoyed being at the helm doing 8 knots plus in flat seas.

Navigation is not difficult here, on the whole. Most of the shores are steep sided and virtually all significant rocks have poles on them. The electronic charts with our GPS position clearly marked was also a great boon. Whilst the tidal range is about a metre and a half there is comparatively little in the way of tidal flow with the exception of the Moskenstraumen between two islands right at the bottom of Lofoten. This is the fabled Maelstrom described by Edgar Allen Poe thus:

*“Even while I gazed, this current acquired a monstrous velocity. Each moment added to its speed – to its headlong impetuosity. In five minutes the whole sea...was lashed into ungovernable fury...Here the vast bed of the waters seamed and scarred into a thousand conflicting channels, burst suddenly into frenzied convulsion – heaving, boiling, hissing”.*

We went through the Maelstrom to reach the anchorage at Helle (67°50'N 012°49'E). Even at slack tide there was a threatening amount of movement in the water. Only used as a storm haven for fishing boats and not a road within five miles, Helle is a delightfully secluded anchorage.

One of the things that has surprised me in this paradise of a cruising ground is the conspicuous lack of other sailing boats. In two weeks I have seen barely five other boats, and only one other non-Norwegian boat – a German who I had last seen in Shetland and who had sailed here through the same storm as we, but single-handed. Having previously felt rather gritty, this news rather humbled me.

We had seen posters up advertising the “Dinartica Midnight Sun Race” – a race from Dinard on the Brittany coast of France to Svolvær taking about eight to ten days. There were eight entrants. This would have more than doubled the sailing population of the Lofoten Islands had they all arrived, but a storm in the North Sea had taken its toll and four had retired hurt. We arrived in Svolvær the evening of the arrival of the winning boat. At 11pm (still broad daylight of course) the reception committee leapt into their RIB saying they had sighted its sail on the horizon and half a dozen boats including ourselves left to welcome it in. It was a fifty foot racing trimaran called Vaincre La Muscovisidose with a French crew of three, based in St Malo. Much sounding of fog horns when they crossed the line in light winds. It must have been quite a moment for them and we were pleased to have been part of a fitting reception committee. The next boat wasn’t due in for another couple of days at the earliest.



**Vaincre La Muscovisidose – winner of the Dinartica Midnight Sun Race**

The following morning, Christopher and David left for home, David having the longer trip ahead of him as he had come all the way from Boston USA for the trip. This was Monday morning and I was not due to greet the next crew until the following Sunday. But Mina<sup>2</sup> was berthed on a pontoon right in the centre of Svolvær overlooking all the quay side bars – so a perfect spot to relax, read, and complete a longish list of tasks.

## Notes on the People of Lofoten

I was rather hoping the people of Lofoten would be blond haired, slim, very attractive people (mainly women in my imagination, with long, long legs). It seems I have got Lofoten confused with Sweden. The people of Lofoten are not that tall and not that physically attractive. Many of the men look very rugged and out-doorish, sporting arctic explorer type beards. Happily the women don't. The Norwegians are very reserved, sometimes to the point of seeming almost unfriendly. You might pass a couple on a steep track up an otherwise deserted mountain. A cheery "God dag" from us would be completely ignored as they would walk past as if we were not there. By contrast, in Scotland, every time we pulled out a map in the street, people came up and asked if they could help and, in Shetland, they nearly killed me with friendliness (see lifeboat chapter above). Here, they will be happy to help if asked. And language is not a problem. My Norwegian Phrase Book lies open at the page that says "God dag" is "Good day" and "Takk" is "Thank you". "God dag, do you speak English?" is without exception followed by "A little - how may I help you?" Whereupon the rest of the conversation is carried out in the most fluent English with barely a trace of an accent.

Norway, as a country, is probably the wealthiest in Europe thanks to their North Sea oil, most of which is exported as they already have as much power as they need for home consumption from their hydro-electric plants, but individually they give the impression of little wealth and one gathers that for those who do have money, flaunting one's wealth is not approved of. The cars are modest as are the houses, most of which seem to have a timber frame with a bit of insulation before plaster board is applied and then timber clad. Many have the traditional corrugated iron roof or, charmingly, grass roofs. Even in the larger towns further south, although the people seem more fashionably dressed and you see the (very) occasional smart car, the shops provide what is required but have little in the way of variety, and luxury goods are almost non-existent.

The entire economy of the Lofoten Islands is dominated by the cod-fishing season from February to May (the early part of which is in eternal darkness) when fisherman come from all over to catch the cod which swarm to the (comparatively) warm Gulf Stream waters to spawn in the spring. In the fishing villages, the harbour-sides are surrounded by rorbus. These are simple red-brown painted fisherman's cottages, originally put up by the locals to rent out to the itinerant fishermen, but now also used as holiday chalets in the summer months.

As far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was considerable demand for dried cod (stockfish) and salted cod (bacalao) as being one of the few food sources high in protein which would not rot. This preserved fish has formed an enduring part of the diet and cuisine of countries from Italy to Nigeria; Portugal to the Caribbean (where cheap cuts were fed to the slaves as a low-cost way of providing them with enough protein and salt to sustain them in their 16-hour days working in the sugar plantations). The Lofoten Islands have the ideal conditions to dry cod. Right temperature, right humidity, plenty of space. On the outskirts of the fishing villages, generally down-wind of the prevailing winds, are acres of A-shaped wooden frames with miles of poles to dry the cod on (stockfish comes from the Dutch word "stokk" meaning a pole). The fish are beheaded, tied together in pairs by the tails and slung

over the poles to dry out before being exported in May. The smell must be truly impressive, but the locals put up with it as being the smell of money! The heads are also dried and hundreds of tons are exported mainly to Nigeria – God only knows what they do with them!



**Christopher and David inspect the crop of cods' heads**

Hardly surprisingly, the local diet is dominated by cod, specialities including cod tongue which is delicious and tastes like a combination of the meat and the roe, and cods roe of course. A limited amount of whaling still takes place and carpaccio of whale meat is another delicacy if you can get hold of it.

The Lofoteners are beginning to farm salmon and trout, but nothing like on the depressing scale as in Scotland, and the local smoked salmon and trout are delicious.

### **The family arrive – Sunday 4 July**

Peter and Maria flew into Oslo on Friday with 18 hours to see the capital of Norway before catching the overnight train to Bodø in the north, from where they were to catch a flight to Svolvær, due to arrive after lunch. My parents, Hugh and Noel, were leaving Hamble on Sunday morning and were due to arrive in Svolvær around 9pm. I awoke to heavy rain and all the surrounding mountains hidden by thick cloud which came down to sea level. A phone call to the airport confirmed my fears that no flights were coming in – but not for want of trying. Peter and Maria boarded the plane and attempted a couple of landings at Svolvær but both were aborted at the last second. Eventually Widerøe Air conceded defeat and put the passengers on the six-hour ferry, due to arrive at 9pm. I had now given up all hope of Hugh and Noel being able to fly across from Bodø as, by this time, the weather was even thicker. I met Peter



and Maria off the ferry. Imagine our surprise when we got back to Mina<sup>2</sup> to find my parents comfortably settled below! Their flight had miraculously made it. Arriving to an empty boat reminiscent of the Mary Celeste, my mother assumed we had all gone out to dinner and greeted us with a frosty “Well, a fine welcome this is!” A great start.

By Monday morning the weather had cleared to a brilliant sunny day and we headed off to Henningsvaer, stopping on the way to catch a couple of fish sufficient for an hors d’oeuvre. Sadly this was to be almost the last we saw of the sun for nearly three weeks.

One thing that had been hanging over my head was the continuing unreliability of the Whispergen generator. Whispergen had finally agreed to send someone out to fix it – irritating that it took them so long to reach this decision as they could have arrived at any time in the previous week when I was alone and conveniently placed in Svolvær – now we were to have Nigel Smith with us whilst we were travelling around. He arrived on Tuesday afternoon when fortunately the weather was miserable so no one felt too frustrated by the delay. After extensive testing, Nigel identified the problem as air getting into the fuel system and, with a bit of ingenuity, we managed to fix it. He eventually left on Wednesday afternoon and, writing this nearly a week later, there have been no further problems. Thank the Lord! Meanwhile the family had got a bus into Kabelvåg to visit the variety of museums there.

I was concerned that my father, aged 85, on his third set of artificial hips and unable to walk more than a quarter of a mile (and not at all without a stick), might have a problem with fishing harbour walls with rickety ladders. I need have had no concerns. Wednesday afternoon we went to Mortsund where there are no pontoons. We arrived at low tide with a good ten feet to the top of the harbour wall. Hugh was up the ladder like a rat up a drainpipe.



**Despite the lack of sunshine, a good time was had by all**

We visited Reine and on the pontoon was a very old looking Viking sailing boat. In fact it turned out to be only ten years old, but built absolutely traditionally. It is owned by a consortium of about a hundred people who take it in turns to use the boat. Their only concession to technology was a GPS and even then there was heated



debate amongst the consortium members whether or not to fit it. On our way back NE we saw her belting along in a stiff breeze. A wonderful sight.



**A traditional Viking boat**

My parents left on Monday 12 July and, that afternoon, the rain came and basically it tipped down non-stop for the next three days. We deferred our push north for a day or so, reading and playing cards. By Wednesday we felt we had to press on, rain or no rain, and we visited Trollfjorden on our way towards Sortland. Trollfjorden (68°21.85'N 014°56.5'E) is probably the hottest tourist attraction on Lofoten. Apart from being the site of a famous battle between fishermen (big capitalist steam trawler owners barring the entrance, but having their blockade smashed by small boat traditional fishermen: David 1: Goliath 0) it is a dramatically steep and narrow fjord with pretty waterfalls cascading down the side. It was impressive and I guess would be even more impressive from the deck of the cruise ships which manage to squeeze in with only inches to spare either side, and barely turning room at the far end.

We then made our way through the canal-like Raftsundet, a quarter mile wide channel between the Lofoten islands of Hinnoey and Austvågøey. It was immensely pretty with tasteful holiday houses sprinkled along the waters edge. Quite a highlight I thought and a contrast to the more brutally dramatic SE coastline.

We had intended ending the day at Blokken, about 5 miles south of Sortland and described in the Norwegian Cruising Guide as “a beautiful small fishing harbour”. Well it must have changed since the Guide was written. The little harbour was dominated by two enormous boat sheds and other industrial buildings. The other side

of the harbour was a tatty looking fish farm. We turned tail to find an alternative berth for the night. I had noted that on the chart there were a couple of bays with anchorages marked, about 3 miles NE of Blokken. The eastern of the two, called Innerhamn (68°37.8'N 015°27.9'E), was absolutely perfect – well protected in about 8 or 9 metres with a sandy bottom. The view across the Sortlandsundet and Sigerfjorden is wonderful and with the surrounding mountains (softer now than in Lofoten) it is reminiscent of the Italian lakes. The only sound in the anchorage is of the waterfall cascading down the mountain behind. The icing on the cake was to find that a couple of white-tailed eagles were in residence just round the corner. Seeing these magnificent birds in flight and on the ground was awe-inspiring.

### **In search of whales**

On Thursday 15 July we headed out of our anchorage to Nyksund (68°59.73'N 015°00.73'E). I had heard that it was not necessary to go as far as Andenes to see whales. Running NE to SW along the northern coast the continental shelf suddenly plunges from 100 m to over 1000m. Go to the tightly grouped contours on the chart and that was where the whales came to feed on the squid and rose to the surface for a breather. I was told that Nyksund was a pretty little fishing harbour in the process of (re)renovation and was worth a visit. The Norwegian Cruising Guide was not specific about the entrance and the charts do not show the man-made barriers at the north and south ends. Entrance has to be from the south west. The harbour is still somewhat dilapidated but there are a couple of café/restaurants and a centre for Arctic adventure holidays together with some harbour side buildings in the process of reconstruction for holiday accommodation.



**Nyksund – still some renovation required**

The place had a slightly “unwashed”, hippy feel about it, not helped by the fact that the quay we choose to tie up against had what transpired to be the main sewage pipe running along it, which the owner decided to unblock whilst we were in situ, the contents dramatically disgorging itself onto the walkway right by the boat. We heard that we were the first big boat to visit Nyksund this year. If this is the welcome they prepare for visitors, I expect we will be the last. We battened down and decided to leave early the following morning in pursuit of whales.

Friday 16 July, the day of the great whale hunt, arrived with little wind but, happily, plenty of sun. We left at 9.15am and headed WNW to the steeply shelving continental shelf where the depth plunges from 100m to 2000m (69°00'N 013°38'E). We called the whale watch team on VHF and asked them where to find whales. They said they weren't going out until the afternoon so didn't have specific information but if we worked east along the contours we would certainly see whales. We set arcs of watch so we were scanning through 360 degrees. Our expectation was that having found the whales, they would be all around us at frighteningly close quarters, majestically flicking the boat with there mighty flukes. I think Peter, who had memories of the SeaWorld show in Orlando, Florida, was half expecting killer whales would do some synchronised double backward somersaults for our entertainment.

The reality was somewhat different. All of a sudden I saw what looked like a puff of smoke some way off. It was a whale blowing. With enormous excitement we then saw a tiny black shape of the fluke as it upended and dived. Somewhat frustratingly this was about as good as it got. We saw similar distant evidence of about three whales over a four hour period and then decided to head south.

The disappointment at the lack of spectacle during our whale watch was more than compensated for by discovering the most perfect anchorage for that night amongst a small collection of rocks in the middle of nowhere – 8 miles from any other land. The outcrop, known as Steine (69°10.1'N 016°31.7'E), was covered with a wonderful variety of birds. Even with my very amateurish knowledge base I identified eight types of bird within an hour of arrival, including a white tailed eagle which briefly flew over us.



**Steine – the perfect fair weather anchorage in the middle of nowhere**

**18 July.** Reluctantly we left the anchorage at Steine and continued heading south, dropping into Harstad, the local big town, for water. In the afternoon, it started raining as we made our way to Fiskefjord and the cloud level was so low we didn't even bother to go in, but went straight to an anchorage just to the south at Kisthomen (68°30.4'N 016°06.05'E). Not only was the weather miserable but we found it was just by the main road, so it wasn't exactly ideal.

The rain continued all night and into the following day. We decided to continue plugging south to Straumshamm, an anchorage described in the Norwegian Cruising Guide as "picture-book". We had to sail across a stretch of open water between Vesterålen and the mainland and the wind had picked up to Force 6 on the nose. Whilst not exactly extreme conditions, I was mindful of the need to give Maria an easy time so it seemed expedient to change plan, bear away to the East and divert to Storjorda (68°12'N 16°04'E) at the entrance to Tysfjorden, which was in the lee of the wind. Tying up alongside a quay, the fishing harbour was not particularly inspiring but it served the purpose until the wind moderated. It is in Tysfjorden that hundreds of killer whales visit in late October, following the herring in from the Atlantic.

Although we were behind schedule, I was determined to visit the "picture-book" anchorage in Straumshamm (68°06.4'N 015°22.3'E) on our way south and the following day, 20 July, with the wind having died away we dropped our anchor there for lunch. It was indeed a delightful spot, made all the lovelier by there being a picturesque old gaff-rigger already at anchor, and an eagle gliding around.

After a leisurely lunch we continued down to Nordskot. On the way we stopped to catch dinner. We caught a small cod and saithe – not quite enough for the three of us for dinner, so we put the line out again and immediately caught a whopping cod, so now we had too much. Nordskot (67°50.2'N 14°47.3'E) is a pretty little harbour, where we picked up a mooring buoy for the night. At last the sun came out – and it was glorious!



**Sunset at midnight with the fishing boats in Nordskot**



On Friday 23 July, Nigel and Jane Fawkes were due to arrive and stay on the boat for two weeks. Jane had naturally assumed that she would be joining Maria and me for the period, not realising (and not having been told by Nigel) that Maria was in fact leaving with Peter two days after their arrival. Jane would just have to become an honorary bloke. Bodø (67°17'N 014°22'E), the port of arrival and departure, has not a lot to recommend it. It was flattened by the Germans during the war and rebuilt when Norway had little wealth. However Jane and Nigel spent a very interesting few hours going round the aeronautical museum they have there, and said that it was really impressive.

The moment the Fawkes stepped on board at 4pm, we set straight off to a small anchorage just an hour's sail away. Osholmen (67°23.8'N 014°15.6'E) is a perfect spot for a warm, sunny night's barbecue with secluded little sandy beaches looking north to the midnight sun. Maria had bought a bag of freshly caught prawns to whet our appetite whilst the chicken was being barbecued (it is extraordinarily difficult finding fresh chicken in Norway and, when you do, it is as expensive as lobster). Nigel, being another TypeA maniac, thought that an arctic swim would sharpen his appetite. About the only thing I don't have on board Mina<sup>2</sup> is a defibrillator and I was glad that both Maria and I had learned the unsubtle techniques of cardio massage during our first aid course but, in the event, Nigel reappeared from the icy water with a grin on his face – or was he just clenching his teeth to stop them from chattering him to death?



**Nigel, Type-A maniac, goes for an arctic swim before warming himself by the post-barbecue beach bonfire**

The following day (Saturday 24 July) we set off to see the whirlpools at Saltstraumen. But first, we had to find a convenient anchorage within walking distance. The obvious one marked on the charts was not suitable anymore as fishermen had filled it with moorings. One of the problems with the whole of this coast is that the coastline shelves so dramatically from the shore that anchorages are often quite difficult to identify. But close inspection of the chart did show a promising ledge behind some rocks, which turned out to be fine (67°14.4'N 014°34.5'E). We anchored, launched the dinghy and landed at a small sandy beach by a farm with a path leading up to the road a short walk from Saltstraumen. Close by was a herd of cows. Maria, quick as a shot, was legging it up the hill, much to the



amusement of us all until, we too, noticed that they only seemed to have one teet and were displaying very aggressive tendencies (Maria's observational skills no doubt honed by her days as a gauchette on the pampas of Argentina). We quickly followed to arrive at a fence, preventing us from getting out of their territory. It was an electric fence, which I inadvertently proved was connected to its electrical supply – seemingly the mains supply judging by the massive jolt I got.

A pleasant twenty minute walk brought us to the bridge over the Saltstraumen. This is the narrow entrance to a large fjord and twice a day the entire contents of the fjord tries to squeeze through the narrows to make its way out to the sea on the falling tide. The tidal flow is terrific with overfalls, standing waves, whirlpools and the whole stretch of water looks as if it is boiling. From the bridge one gets an impressive view of the hell-like maelstrom below.

We sauntered back to our dinghy on the beach, first renegotiating the electric fence and making sure that the bulls were out of sight. I was surprised to see that my dinghy (actually, quite a heavy rib with a weighty 15hp outboard) was facing in the opposite direction to how we had left it. Had the farmer taken it out for a spin? Then I noticed that the sand all around it had been completely ploughed up. It was evident that the bulls had decided to investigate the strange object that had been left on their beach. They must have pushed the boat round through 180 degrees which would have involved quite a lot of muscle power. Given the beasts were all endowed with lethal looking horns I was relieved and amazed that they had not punctured the tubes. As it was now 11pm in a desolate area with my puncture repair kit half a mile away on an anchored Mina<sup>2</sup> I hate to think what we would have done.

That evening, a heavy mist rolled into the anchorage giving a rather spooky, haunted look to the place.



**Spooky mist settles over the anchorage**

**Sunday 25 July** and back to Bodø to bid Maria and Peter farewell. It was cruel that in the three weeks we had been together, there had been just three days of sunshine and many days of continuous torrential rain. The average summer temperature up here is, surprisingly, only two or three degrees below the average temperature in Britain, but it seems to be made up of the combination of very hot days and very cold days. Maria and Peter seem to have had the entire summer's allocation of cold, wet days. My enduring memory of the Norwegian cruise will be of greens and yellows; browns and blues. Maria's memory will be of a uniform grey.

Having said our goodbyes, Nigel, Jane and I headed off to the island of Fugloey, some 20 miles SW of Bodø and to the little fishing harbour of Sandviken (67°03.096'N 013°46.535'E). The few pontoons are not suitable for a 50-footer but we tied up alongside a couple of fishing boats which had been bought by families and converted to floating mobile homes. The holiday homes on the island were very pretty and decidedly upmarket compared to the Rorbus we had seen thus far.

An enormous craggy mountain towers over the village and is the home to a large puffin colony. Half way up the mountain at the head of a valley is small tarn, apparently full of trout and, higher still, the macabre wreckage of a plane which smashed into the mountain in the 1960's, engines and wings strewn around. The terrain provided for challenging walking; a little too challenging for my ankle which was still weak and prone to turning. So I left Nigel to the challenges of the mountain, dragging Jane gamely behind him, whilst I took a lower route round the headland. The rough ground was covered with succulent bilberries and the much-prized cloudberries. Jane, being an incurable berry collector came back with more than enough for an excellent fruit tart for dinner.

Looking five miles south, the island of Hoegnakken is dominated by two enormously high peaks separated by a steep valley. Slung between the two peaks are immense wires more than a mile long which are antennae for the very low frequency radio transmissions needed for communication with NATO atomic submarines. The weight of these wires must be fantastic and how they were ever strung up, I can't imagine.

Nigel is a very competent watercolourist. It had been one of my retirement plans to start doing a bit of painting if I could. Whilst working it was difficult to find the time but, more than that, you have to be truly chilled out to be able to sit quietly for an hour or two, peacefully observing your subject and slowly and patiently building up the colours into a picture. I now felt ready for the challenge. Nigel turned out to be a patient and inspiring teacher. My first attempt was pretty poor but it was a start.

**26 July.** At the start of the 30-mile sail to Enga we decided to stop off at Støtt, a sleepy and not particularly attractive fishing village but it had a shop and we were running out of provisions. We also needed to replace our fishing hooks which had got caught under the boat the previous day and the line broke. As we drifted by the shop looking for a quayside to tie up against, our first indication that we would be made welcome was the owner coming out and waving enthusiastically to us. You don't expect a small shop in a small fishing village half way up Norway to be as busy as Harrods during the sales but we got a hint of the rush of customers when we were

asked to sign the visitors' book. The book was yellowing with age and our entry was on about page three!

Our destination, Enga (66°42.5'N 013°42.85'E), brought us to the snout of the spectacular Svartisen glacier (meaning "black ice") which promised to be a highlight of the cruise and it didn't disappoint. The sheer scale of a large glacier is difficult to comprehend. The spectacular beauty of these natural phenomena hides the enormous forces which scrape mountains smooth and have shaped the landscape of so much of northern Europe. There is a long pontoon right by the foot of the glacier providing one's first impressive view of the glacier. Once again I was amazed to find that at the foot of one of the most impressive sights along this spectacular coast we were the only boat apart from a tourist ferry which had just brought in a handful of people. To say that the Norwegian tourist industry has not yet quite got the hang of it is an understatement. We walked up to the tourist centre and café and, after a bit of nosing around, we found someone lurking in a backroom. We asked if there was any information about the glacier, the reaction being "Glacier? What glacier? Oh, that one. No, sorry, we don't have any pamphlets or anything". Extraordinary.



**Mina<sup>2</sup> on arguably one of the most spectacular pontoons in Europe.**

We were to explore the glacier the following day but, first, Nigel was determined to catch dinner. Out went the line and after a few minutes he was sure that his skills as an experienced fly-fisherman had borne fruit. Up came the line together with his catch which was smaller than your average whitebait. Nigel's apparent inability to catch anything longer than three inches, whereas all I had to do was to chuck the line

over and bring in a feast for ten, was to prove a sore point for Nigel for days to come. He clearly felt that his manhood was being questioned.



**Some have what it takes.....**



**.....and some don't**

**27 July.** After an early breakfast we headed off to explore the glacier. The route took us through delightful birch woods, the trees dripping with moss and enormous boulders left over thousands of years by the receding glacier, and now covered with lichens of every colour.



**Troll country on the way to the glacier**

The glacier itself is truly awe-inspiring and I am not a sufficiently good writer to describe the almost spiritual experience of seeing the extraordinary beauty of the immense glacier at close quarters. I had heard that glaciers throw off an amazing blue colour in the crevasses but it really has to be seen to be believed. The photographs are a poor reflection of the reality. The other enduring memory will be how absolutely massive it is – and we are just talking about the butt end of the glacier – at the top it is hundreds of feet thick. Having marvelled at it, prodded it, been terrified by it as periodic loud crunching grumbles emanated from it – normally whilst Nigel was standing underneath it - and photographed it endlessly, Nigel hacked a bit out of

it and this absolutely transparent clear piece of ice was packed into my rucksack to take back to the freezer. In terms of one-upmanship, offering 4,000 year-old glacier ice to chill the gin and tonic takes some beating!



**The blue of the glacier is indescribable**



**Packing the ultimate G&T additive**

The following morning we reluctantly left this idyllic mooring but the conditions were right to teach the Fawkes a few sailing skills (which I am happy to say they were keen to learn) by sailing off the pontoon and immediately hoisting the cruising chute – a grand exit from grand surroundings. And much appreciated by the handful



of locals who all rushed out and lined the shore, slack-jawed at this amazing display of seamanship! Just as well they didn't see the chute collapsing the moment we rounded the headland as the wind, once more, showed its fickle tendencies.

We spent the night at Halså (66°44.6'N 013°33.0'E), a pretty little harbour with a long guest pontoon, fuel water, two supermarkets and a café.

**28 July.** A short 18-mile hop to the outlying island of Renga, and a delightful anchorage on the western side at 66°36'N 013°06.0'E on what was yet another beautifully hot and sunny day.

Making our approach we saw a black back and fin describing a slow arc out of the water before languorously slipping below the waves again – our first porpoise. I believe that dolphins and porpoises are not just different species but, notwithstanding their similar physical shape, came from totally different families of animals. I have been fortunate enough to have had dolphins come to the boat occasionally and play around us, diving around the bow wave, swimming under the keel and flying out of the water the other side – a proactive interaction by the dolphins with the boat. Porpoises on the other hand (or at least the porpoises here) seem to be very much smaller, completely black (rather than the different and patchy colouring of the dolphins), much more sluggish (almost slow motion in comparison to the rushing and dashing of the dolphins) and apparently completely lacking in curiosity. They showed no interest in the boat or indeed any indication that they were aware of our presence. Pretty boring, actually, after the initial excitement of seeing the first one.

Arriving in the anchorage we saw another large yacht (in fact the only Norwegian yacht of a similar size to Mina<sup>2</sup> I saw on the entire cruise), a Baltic 53 owned by a couple from Tromsø. Semi-retired, he sails with his wife and dog during May to October (in fact any month when there is any daylight at all) and often goes up to Svalbard. Along this stretch of the coast, this was his favourite anchorage. He pointed out an eagle's eyrie on the wooded slopes and, eventually, we saw the majestic resident gliding high over the hills. It did not have the distinctive white tail and yellow head so we concluded that it was either a golden eagle or a juvenile white-tailed eagle – either way an impressive sight. He advised us of an easy walk up the hills around the bay so off we went. We must have missed it, as the route we eventually took would not have been described as easy, even by Sherpa Tensing. We would have benefited from ropes and crampons. However it was worth all the effort when, eventually, we arrived at the top of the hill and we enjoyed the splendid views over miles of islands.

The following day was even hotter than the day before. Nigel and Jane went off for another walk but my ankle was feeling the effects of yesterday's arduous climb so I stayed on the boat to develop my newly-found water colouring techniques. They came back proudly bearing a trophy for Mina<sup>2</sup>: a complete reindeer antler which they had found discarded on a nearby hill. There was sadly no evidence of the previous owner. The antler is now Velcro'ed to the saloon wall as a memento of this wonderful cruise.



### **We obviously missed the easy track Reindeer antler – a memento of our trip**

In the afternoon it was, at 26°C, almost uncomfortably hot (and we were still north of the Arctic Circle) so we set sail for Silvågen. Perhaps becoming over-confident we threw up the cruising chute ahead of a jibe round the headland. I made the mistake of throwing off the sheet with the wind directly behind us rather than whilst still on a broad reach. The voluminous sail promptly wrapped itself not only round the forestay but it cleverly added a separate wrap round the inner forestay as well. [Experienced sailors read on; non-sailors move to the next paragraph please] At this point I had hour-glasses not only vertically, but horizontally as well. I could not have achieved this in a million years had I been mad enough to try it deliberately. To make matters worse, the wind had decided to increase significantly; the sound of light sailcloth flogging itself to death was painful. There was no way we could snuff the sail with the sock so we had to resort to releasing the tack line and then pulling the sail by hand round the various stays ending in a conventional drop.

I was grateful, with the help of Nigel's muscle power, to get the cruising chute down at all, notwithstanding the rip in the cloth where it got caught round one of the crosstrees.

We continued on our way and at 6.30pm we crossed south of the Arctic Circle marking the occasion with a glass of dry sherry. I would dearly love to return but, with the rest of the world beckoning, I doubt if I will find the time.

We eventually anchored in Silvågen and, sitting in the cockpit over a(nother) glass of wine at 1am, the temperature was still above 20°C.

Silvågen (66°19'N 013°08'E) is described in The Norwegian Cruising Guide as "a large landlocked bay with spectacular mountains and waterfalls". Perhaps we were getting blasé but the mountains were no more spectacular than most others. As for the waterfalls, either the spell of hot dry weather had dried them up completely, or the authors had got this anchorage confused with another but, try as we might, we could find no evidence of a waterfall at all. Disgusted, we left (relatively) early the following morning for the 35 mile leg to Alstahåg.

**31 July 2004.** Just before entering the bay at Alstahåg (65°53.75'N 012°23.65'E) we decided to stop close to some rocks and catch some fish for dinner. Keen to let Nigel prove his manhood as a hunter gatherer, I let him get on with it. Nothing was forthcoming. Nothing. In exasperation, he handed the line to me. A couple of tugs

later and thump... I had got something and it wasn't a tiddler. I hauled the line up and there was the most enormous saithe, as big as I had seen even in the catches of the professional fishermen. It took two of us to haul it out of the water and onto the boat. It measured more than 3 ft long. God knows what it weighed. After the photocalls, I set to gutting and filleting it on the aft deck. In the stomach of the fish we were amazed to see a sizeable fish still completely intact. Embarrassingly for Nigel, even our fish's lunch was considerably bigger than anything he had managed to catch so far.



**Monster saithe - even its lunch was bigger than anything Nigel had caught**

The voluminous guts were causing a stir in the local gull community and there was quite a gathering flying in from all directions. Behind me I heard a rather pathetic mewling – a bird call I didn't recognise. Turning round I was surprised to see an enormous eagle swooping round the boat. A second later, two more eagles arrived. An amazing experience but I have to say tinged with disappointment to find that their call was so pathetic. It was a bit like finding a member of the England rugby team having a high-pitched girly voice with a lisp. Nigel whipped out the camera and managed to get a shot of one before they flew back to sit on some nearby rocks.



### **A surprisingly girly call from our majestic visitor**

Having taken two enormous fillets off the fish we dismembered the carcass and threw it piece by piece into the water to try and tempt the eagles back again. But they are unusually picky and whilst they sent the teenager out for a quick recce, he reported back that only scraps were available. Nothing other than the entire fish was acceptable so they decided to stay put.

We were still enjoying unbroken blue skies and temperatures well into the upper 20's. Poor Maria, I wish she could have been here to enjoy the glacier and the hot weather.

Now we are moving south and have got to the end of July, there is no longer any midnight sun. Whilst one can still read in the cockpit (just) at 2am, it is becoming increasingly dark at night and, last night, I saw my first star for two months (well, a planet actually, but a heavenly body nevertheless). This came as an abrupt reminder that my first adventure on Mina<sup>2</sup> will come to an end. In just over a month I will be back in London – hopefully to plan the next adventure. But an adventure it is; every day as we move south brings a discernibly different landscape. Having only two days ago been exploring the Svartisen glacier, only the smallest scraps of snow are now to be seen on the mountains. The shoreline is lush with sheep and cows grazing next to the occasional arable field. The population grows a little more dense – but sailing boats are still a rarity and we still feel as if we have this wonderful coastline to ourselves.

**1 August.** Nigel and Jane went ashore to look at the church, museums and house of noted 18<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian poet, Peder Dass. I stayed on board to repair the cruising chute: stitching, taping and then getting it all back into its sock. We could see that there was low cloud to the south where we were headed so we decided to defer our departure from Alstahåg until late in the afternoon. Being on the boat for some time there are things you become aware of – like how much your hair has grown since you left home. In the heat my mop was becoming uncomfortably hot so, grabbing the scissors, Jane said she would do her best. She has missed her vocation: I haven't had such a good cut for years.





### **A day for practical matters, repairing the cruising chute followed by a haircut**

By the time we left Alstahåg, the wind had swung to the west and was decidedly cooler but, in an absolutely flat sea, they were perfect conditions to test the repaired cruising chute. It went up like a dream and we had perfect sailing doing 7 knots with 9 – 10 knots of wind on the beam.

On the way to Straumoya (65°33.3'N 012°14.4'E) we saw a black shape in the water. As we glided past, we saw it was the head of a large seal – the first we had seen. Something glinted in the sunlight and we saw it had a very big fish in its mouth. You could see Nigel wince – every body was catching big fish except for him.

Straumoya was said to be the most popular bay in the area and we should expect to be one of perhaps twenty boats. In the event it was completely deserted. The bay had two pontoons complete with picnic tables, fish gutting benches, barbecues and, on the land, childrens swings, trampolines, hammocks etc. During the evening the fog came down and stayed all night. Nigel prepared what he called a “bum omelette” which seemed to have every ingredient in the fridge and larder. Delicious!

**2 August.** We awoke to thick fog – the first we had experienced. But it had lifted by 11.30 so we pressed on south to Moihavn (65°24.6'N 12°07'E), a lovely quiet anchorage, to visit the mountain, Torghattan, which has a hole going right through it. Jane and Nigel took the bikes out to do a recce – only the third time the bikes have been used which is a little disappointing.

**3 August.** We set off for a long walk to Torghatten. At the base was this amazing, large, new, glass and wood tourist centre. Bang in the middle of the tourist season and it was shut. There was, however, an information board which gave the folklore story about how the hole appeared. All about giants shooting holes in hats with arrows and then the whole lot turning to stone. I have to say it didn't sound very plausible even by the standards of Nordic sagas.





**Torghatten – the mount with the hole**

We made the long climb up the mountain and through the hole. Wanting to do the round trip we set off down the other side of the mountain. We had not gone far when there was a commotion behind us with an hysterical woman shouting. We were surprised to find she was shouting at us. We shouted back that we spoke English and she started yelling at us to turn back. It was dangerous that way. We had to return by the way we had come. This was a red rag to Type A Nigel who now saw the descent down the “wrong” side as a challenge. He curtly thanked the woman for her concern, spun on his heel and headed resolutely into the abyss. Jane and I meekly followed, wondering whether the mad woman actually worked for the tourist board and had already dragged three corpses off the hill this week. In the event, Nigel was right and, certainly by the standards he had set on walks earlier in the week, this one was a cakewalk.



**The speck in the middle is Jane**



**Looking down into the abyss**

Not done with challenges, we had no sooner reached the sea at the bottom of the mountain than Nigel was ripping his clothes off and going for another anaesthetising

swim. I wondered whether he had set his own personal triathlon and forgotten to tell us. Would he get back to the boat, pull one of the bikes out and cycle to Oslo? His third personal challenge was rather more strange however. We were power walking back to the boat (you don't amble when Nigel is with you), Jane picking raspberries, bilberries and the occasional cloudberry for another excellent tart when Nigel noticed a bright red berry which he could not identify. Being the madman that he is, he could think of nothing better to do than eat it and see what it tasted like. His verdict was that it was absolutely delicious and strode on but Jane and I spent the rest of the day waiting for the stomach cramps and hallucinations to kick in. Disappointingly there didn't seem to be any adverse reactions as I was rather wanting to find out if my portable bilge pump would double as a stomach pump.

We got back to Mina<sup>2</sup> to find a particularly beautiful American boat in the anchorage. From Nantucket in Maine, she had a crew of strapping lads together with the owner swimming in near Arctic waters – so Nigel was not the only maniac in the area. As we passed them on our way out of the anchorage we had a brief chat with them. They were in Lofoten two weeks ago, and were now heading back to Bergen. Whilst in sight of the anchorage, I decided to be provocative and we whipped up the cruising chute. We immediately saw frenzied activity on the American boat as sails flew up. The sight of our “battle flag” had tempted the Yanky Navy to come out of port in pursuit. We had a race on. Their spinnaker went up and they were making discernible gains on us. When the wind shifted we executed a text book gybe of our cruising chute but the Yanks got into a pickle and we sailed off into the sunset – a resounding victory for the Brits.

We had a very pleasant sail almost to Solsemvågen. I decided to take the more interesting outside route, the final approach going through a narrow between two navigation marks. Somewhat misleadingly I thought, if you look VERY carefully at the chart, the buoys do not actually lead you through clear water but smack into a one meter rock. It is best to notice these things before you commit yourself but I decided to have a close look at the chart only after the event. I was somewhat alarmed to see the depth reducing very rapidly, and fortunately brought the speed right down to about 2.5 knots when CRUUUNCH. The boat leapt about six inches out of the water and juddered to a halt. We were perched on top of the rock with our keel being the pivot point. Fortunately we were on a rising tide so no panic and, in the event, using a combination of engine and bow thruster, we managed to get off.

At this point, Nigel had the second near death experience of the day. He discovered a tick had firmly attached itself to his body. For decencies sake, I will not say which part of his body (see photo). Having got into port and safely anchored Jane started getting quite excited about the impending surgical procedure. There was a glint in her eye as there was talk of Marigold gloves and Vaseline. We set up the two-million-candle-power torch as theatre lighting, the instruments were sterilised and the patient anaesthetised (gin). The operating team worked around the clock during the complex, bloody procedure and, between them, the disgusting animal was separated from the tick.



### **Open surgery – the lost blood was replaced with gin**

Solsemsvågen (65°03.7'N 011°32.0'E) is a pleasant anchorage and it had one other boat in it, with beautiful classic lines – early seventies I guessed – and flying a red ensign, only the third I had seen since the beginning of June. The following morning the sole occupant rowed over to pay his compliments and immediately explained that he was Norwegian but his boat remained UK registered. It was built in 1972 by Souters of Cowes for the Admirals' Cup and it was designed by Angus Primrose. The original owner was “a baronet” but he couldn't remember his name. It wasn't Max Aitken. Could it be Maurice Laing?

**4 August.** We left for Villa Havn, a really delightful anchorage in the middle of the skerries (64°32.7'N 010°42.4'E). We were able to tie up alongside a pontoon and, on a perfect evening, Nigel and I sat quietly painting whilst Jane prepared yet another delicious fish dinner from the second half of the giant saithe. There is a hill behind the anchorage which requires a bit of puff to get to the top of (passing fish heads on the way – the sign of a close-by eagle?), but the view was fantastic, looking down to the anchorage on one side and the outlying skerries on the other.



### **Villa Havn**

**5 August.** Jane was doing nothing more than leaning over to look at the chartplotter when – click – her back went out quite badly. We managed to get her to the luxurious skipper's berth where I gave her back a massage to see if I could ease the spasm. She claimed it had helped but I noticed for the rest of the day she preferred to

chew painkillers than ask for another massage so I guess that physiotherapy will not be my second career.

“I think you will find that I have most things on this boat” has been my constant refrain when being asked for increasingly unlikely bits of kit. Sink plungers, nail clippers, adhesive Velcro, spare weights for fishing lines etc. However, I was finally caught out when Jane, preparing a delicious fish pie, said “Can you tell me where the nutmeg is?” Damn, caught out at last but I have added it to my shopping list. However my reputation for having the most comprehensively supplied boat on the Norwegian coast was restored when no sooner had Jane put her back out than I produced a surgical back support.

We motored most of the way to Kuringvågen (64°02.385'N 010°03.721'E) – a pretty little harbour with a long guest pontoon, and a yacht club with laundry facilities, showers etc. On the way into the bay we stopped to give Nigel one further opportunity to catch some fish. He put out the new line with smaller lures to catch herring. In 60m of water, he put it down to the bottom and was amazed to pull up a couple of Acadian Redfish. A few more attempts and we had seven or so which would be more than enough for dinner. I have to say that he redeemed himself completely. Compared to the relatively bland taste of cod and saithe where you have to load other flavours into it (onion, garlic, tomato etc) the Redfish had a superb texture and flavour. Nigel’s reputation as an effective hunter gatherer had been restored – but at some cost. The Redfish is a member of the scorpion fish family and has an impressive array of sharp spines along its back, some of which are venomous. Nigel took more than usual care when gutting and filleting them, but still ended up looking like a pin cushion! Mind you, for someone who thinks nothing of sampling unidentified red berries, what’s a little scorpion fish venom?



**At last Nigel earns his spurs as a hunter/gatherer**

**Venomous Acadian Redfish**

**6 August.** Having spent the entire day yesterday lying down in some considerable pain, Jane's back is on the mend. She is up, but still moving like a deportment teacher. Hot and muggy, there was not a whisper of wind so today we had a rather boring motor, although better for Jane who probably appreciated not being thrown from one side of the cabin to the other.

We had intended going to Brekstad as the crew changeover port. Trondheim was a further 25 miles (in the wrong direction) and there was a quick one hour ferry service between the two. However, en route, Nigel discovered that Norwegian public transport is clearly geared for commuting and not for leisure. Whilst weekday ferries went on the hour every hour, on Saturday (tomorrow and their day of departure) there was only one ferry and that was at 4.30pm – too late to catch their plane. When enquiring about buses as an alternative, Nigel was told that “Oh no, bus drivers do not drive on Saturdays!”. So the only way to get the Fawkes away was to make the diversion up to Trondheim. For this evening we decided to go a little further than Brekstad and found on the chart an anchorage at Selvbukt on the south side of the Trondheim fjord (63°37'N 009°43.5'E). Not particularly inspiring – a bit industrial but good enough for our purposes. The day's mugginess ended in an enormous thunder cloud developing and, like somebody opening a massive trapdoor, it dumped its contents spectacularly as it moved slowly down the fjord. Ten minutes later the skies were blue again.



**Nature doesn't do anything by halves in Norway – a truly spectacular rain storm sweeps down the fjord**

**7 August.** So after more than two weeks, the Fawkes were due to leave and the Hartley's arrive. We motored into Trondheim (63°26'N 010°22.5'E). On the way we saw loads of porpoises and, spectacularly, saw an eagle swoop low over the water, grab a large fish in its talons and make its way to a rock for an early lunch.



On the way, Mina<sup>2</sup>'s log registered 10,000 miles – 3,300 miles under present ownership and 2,300 since the beginning of this year's cruise.

Once in Trondheim, we refuelled and watered and had a thorough clean up of the boat for the new arrivals. As Jane's back was still very vulnerable - although she looked very fetching in my surgical back support - she was on light duties. I found some very pressing matter on deck which required my urgent attention, and therefore it was left to Nigel to clean the heads, cooker and oven.



**Jane was on light duties ...**



**... Nigel was not !**

After two weeks on a boat, you get to know all the weaknesses of a skipper and it was imperative that I avoided any overlap of departing and arriving guests. If the Hartley's knew what I was really like, they would probably turn straight around and catch the next plane home. With timing nearing perfection I bundled the Fawkes into a taxi which, on leaving the pier, passed the taxi in which the Hartley's were arriving.

The Hartley's had made it very clear to me that they had never been on a boat before and I was to expect fumbling ignorance and incompetence. More than that, a "friend" of Jenny's, who professed to be a sailor, had regaled them with tales of fog and vicious winds right the way up the Norwegian coast and urged them to reconsider. This put Jenny in a muck sweat and I was under strict instructions from Maria to take them out in no more than a Force 3.

But first, we went for a walk round Trondheim which is delightful. Lots of old buildings down narrow streets which had been tastefully converted into cafés and bars. A nice atmosphere. Trondheim used to be the capital of Norway and still has a royal palace which is open to the public when the royal family are not in residence. The cathedral, also, is spectacular, at least from the outside as we were unable to go in due to a concert taking place.

**8 August.** We made an early start for the Storfosnavågen anchorage (63°39.2'N 009°24.5'E). Helpfully, whilst the Hartley's acclimatised themselves to life afloat, there was little wind so we motored most of the way, but we managed to get the sails up for the last half hour, introducing Nick and Jenny to the silent joys of using God's own energy, amidst a school of porpoises lazily undulating through the water.

Storfosnavågen had a marina but we decided it would be nicer to drop anchor in the middle of the large bay. There was a good walk in the hills (small by Norwegian standards), overlooking the bay and skerries. There is now nothing more than a northerly glow in the sky at 0100. The nights are rapidly drawing in.

**9 August.** I found that a comfortable pattern was to plan legs of 20 to 30 miles each day. This allowed time in the morning to explore the surrounding countryside and then to leave at lunchtime for the next destination, with no pressure to motor the moment the wind went light. Typically we would arrive at the next anchorage at about 1800 with time for a quick recce ashore before dinner. Today, however, we had planned a longer than usual leg – 42 miles from Storfosnavågen to Ringholmen. For most of the day, there was just enough wind to deter us from turning the engine on. In a calm, Nick and Jenny got the fishing lines out and, simultaneously, both felt a bite on their lines. Jenny landed a small saithe and Nick a mackerel (which surprised me as I didn't know they had any here). Being lunchtime, the fish were immediately gutted and fried in a little butter. The goujons, dipped in Äöli, were delicious!

After lunch, Nick and Jenny were ready for their first spells at the helm. By 1700 it was clear that the relatively slow speeds achieved in the light winds meant that we would not reach our destination until about 2200, so we headed for another anchorage at Skogny (63°23'N 008°33'E), which turned out to be absolutely delightful. On the way in, now with time on our hands, we stopped for more fish and Nick caught a large cod. This was cooked by Jenny, whilst I did my first "solo" watercolour of the bay. Nick and Jenny saw their first eagle so, in all, a memorable day for them.

**10 August.** Another baking hot day, so much so that Nick and Jenny decided that if they didn't go for a swim today, they probably never would. There was perhaps more than 20°C difference between the air temperature and water temperature, so they didn't exactly hang around. One lap of the boat and honour was done.



### **Mediterranean air – Arctic water**

We left Skogly, motoring to Ringholmen (63°12.18'N 007°57.39'E) through glassy smooth water. After the lower landscape we had been passing through over the last couple of days, we could see mountains looming, once again, out of the slightly misty sea. The wind picked up for an hour of pleasant reaching, then a cruising chute run until the wind died again.

Ringholmen is a delightful tiny island with an 1845 building (comparatively old by Norwegian standards) now converted into a restaurant. The owners have also tastefully built some traditional grass-roofed cabins for holidays, conferences etc. The owner's day job is traffic controller at Kristiansund, whilst his wife is a nurse. How they find the time to run this resort island, I don't know, but he was very garrulous and unusually friendly. His wife dished up for us the most marvellous bacalao for dinner and he served it with an aniseed-flavoured aquavit which complemented the flavour brilliantly.

Whilst we ate dinner a local, sitting on the terrace, periodically lurched past us to get yet another beer. Having drunk himself almost insensible, in the finest of Viking traditions, he staggered down the pontoon to his dinghy, cast off, then tried to start the outboard from a standing position. Mistake number one. He gave a mighty pull on the chord and keeled over backwards straight into the water. Luckily for him the outboard had failed to start as there would have been a very real danger of him being cut to pieces by the propeller. Just south of the Arctic Circle the water temperature is still only about 6°C and it only takes a few minutes before life-threatening hypothermia grips you and renders you incapable (to the extent that vast quantities of lager had not already done that for him). As he struggled to climb back into the dinghy I found myself, alone on the pontoon, wondering when I was going to have to jump in and attempt a rescue. The thought of the freezing water and the fact that I can hardly swim a stroke appalled me. Luckily, he eventually managed to haul himself back on board. Relief flooded through me until I noticed he had seen one of his shoes floating in the water, just a little more than an arms-length away from the dinghy. Whether it was the alcohol or the onset of hypothermia that clouded his judgement I don't know, but he made a lunge for the shoe and promptly fell back into the water again. Once back on board it was probably wise of him to realise that he would be better off without the freezing cold T-shirt clinging to his body. What

was less wise was attempting to peel it over his head from a standing position. Once he had clambered back into the dinghy for the **third** time, he got the outboard started (he was obviously sobering up pretty quickly as this time he did it from a seated position) and roared off. He clearly survived the journey home as I saw him the following morning with two children. I wonder if they knew how close they came the previous evening to losing their father!

**11 August.** We awoke to a fresh Force 5 from the NE and a thick mist, but this burned off by 1000 as we set off for Håholmen, running in an uncomfortable rolling sea. Håholmen (63°01.7'N 007°23.7'E) is the home of legendary Norwegian explorer and adventurer Ragnar Thorseth who constructed an exact replica of a Viking trading ship and not only crossed the Atlantic to America (I think it is now pretty widely accepted that it was the Vikings, not Columbus, who discovered America) but then continued a complete circumnavigation. As preparation for this adventure, he was the first person to row single-handed from Norway to Shetland, and he was the first Norwegian to take a team to the North Pole. He has developed Håholmen, an old fishing village, into a small and very tasteful tourist and conference centre with a museum of all Thorseth's adventures.

The approach to the little marina was as challenging pilotage as I had come across. But once again the chartplotter guided us through the myriad rocks with no trouble. I later looked at the Norwegian 1:50,000 chart of the area which, in comparison, was so small that I doubt I would have attempted it.



**Håholmen – home of Norwegian adventurer Ragnar Thorseth**

Thorseth's Viking ship was wrecked off the coast of Spain in 1992 but the wreck was salvaged and brought back here where the remains form the centrepiece of the lovely little museum. We were disappointed to find the museum shut, but the receptionist later came down to the boat and said not only would she open it up for us but she would screen the English version of a half hour film of the life and adventures of Thorseth. A private viewing! It was fascinating.

Later that evening, we were grateful to be alongside a pontoon (as usual, the only boat there) as the wind increased to Force 6 – the strongest I had experienced in my entire time in Norway – but we felt snug.

The entire coast of Norway can be cruised through the Indreleia, the passage protected from the ocean swell by the outlying islands and skerries. There are only four gaps where one does not have this protection and one of these lies just south of Håholmen. So I was winding the Hartley's up about the fearsome conditions we were to endure the following day.

**12 August.** We awoke to a very fresh 20 knot breeze. Given the unprotected waters on this leg, the concerns expressed by Jenny before she came out, and the strict instructions I had received from Maria not to take them out in anything over a Force 3, I thought it best to stay put for the day – there were certainly worse places to be holed up. I tried to get the watermaker going for the first time. I had been persuaded by Fox's that, even though I may not need it for a couple of years, as I was having the boat taken apart for the installation of the Whispergen, it would be worth fitting the watermaker at the same time. But I wanted to make sure that it did work, given that virtually everything else they had fitted had failed. Instruction book in hand, I changed the pickling cartridge for a filter; turned the numerous taps to the right position, threw the power switch and – nothing. I called Henry at Fox's who was preparing to go on holiday, and he promised to get back to me. The call failed to materialise so I will have to get on to them on Monday.

Being an island, all the guests and visitors to Håholmen have to be ferried in by a replica Viking ship or a fast motor boat operated by a couple of boatmen. Chatting to them, they told me that the wind was due to die to about six knots this evening and swing round to the West, and they kindly took me out on the motor launch to show me the more direct westerly route out through the rocks.

## **FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH**

The wind was moderating, but was still blowing 15 knots rather than the 6 knots forecast by the locals. However, having lost a day, we now had 52 miles to do to get to Ålesund for the Hartley's to catch their plane home so, in the expectation of the wind moderating further we cast off and headed out to sea. Away from the protection of the skerries there was quite a swell running. The wind moved to NNE (dead astern) and increased to Force 6. We were running, goose winging the yankee and making 7 to 7½ knots. Very satisfactory. However the wind progressively increased to Force 7 and the rolling of the boat on the swells meant it was progressively more difficult to keep the yankee filled without hand-steering. The ride was exhilarating; we were now coasting down the swells, maintaining speed in excess of 8½ knots and on occasion touching 10 knots.

Taking on completely inexperienced guests (inexperience of sailing, that is – not being guests) is something of a lottery. They are either terrified out of their wits when they hit the wake of the first passing ferry, or they are thrilled at the novelty of it all and feel secure in the completely unfounded confidence they have in their skipper. I am delighted to say that the Hartley's fell into the latter category. They had taken a Stugeron each, and claimed to be thoroughly enjoying the unexpectedly wild conditions, so we hammered on. When the wind started gusting Force 8 I decided



enough was enough and it was time to reef. I calmly explained to Nick and Jenny what I was going to do; that having to bring the boat round into the wind to reef the main would mean that we would, in the process, be broadside to the now breaking waves; it would get distinctly wet for a while and the apparent wind speed would increase dramatically. I also warned them that when reefing the yankee, the sail would be flogging for a while and it would all be very noisy.

In the winter I had an electric winch fitted for all the mainsail controls and, today more than any other, I was grateful that I had. Manually grinding in miles of mainsheet and then rolling a deep reef into the mast in gale force winds would have taken forever. My briefing to Nick and Jenny was not exaggerated. As we rounded up into the wind, the apparent speed increased from 25 knots to 35 knots. As the wind howled through the rigging, and the boat started heeling dramatically, the Hartley's continued to grin. When a curling wave slapped the side of the boat and dumped half a ton of green water on to them – my, how they laughed. I began to suspect that it wasn't just Stugeron pills they had taken.

With a deep reef in the main and only the small staysail up, we were still creaming along at 7½ knots and in no time at all we were entering the contrasting tranquillity of Ålesund harbour (62°28.3'N 006°009.17'E). There are pontoons for visitors at the far end of the harbour but, there being no room, we tied up alongside the commercial quay in between the fishing boats. As it was low water, the only other endurance test for Jenny was to scale the quayside up the truck tyres, prior to an excellent dinner ashore at a quayside restaurant overlooking Mina<sup>2</sup>. A perfect end to an exhilarating day's sailing.

**14 August.** Maria arrives today at about 1700 and the Hartley's are taking the Hurtigruten ferry to Bergen just after midnight, so a day of sight-seeing, shopping, packing and tidying up.

Ålesund was burned to the ground in 1902. The catastrophe shocked the whole nation who rallied round to reconstruct the town from scratch. Immediate aid was provided by Kaiser Bill who used to summer here – a gesture still remembered here with commemorative plaques. The finest architects and craftsmen in the country and beyond put their hands to the reconstruction project. Art Nouveau being in vogue at the time, most of the buildings are constructed in that style, and the town planners ensure that more recent buildings complement the style as well. The effect is startlingly attractive. Behind the town is a hill about 400 ft high. The heart-thumping climb to the top is rewarded by the most spectacular panorama of the isthmus.



**Ålesund panorama**

They are big on statuary here, including an imposing representation of local lad-turned-good, Rollo. It was he who, as a Viking leader, invaded what is now France

and in about 950AD declared himself the first Duke of Normandy. His great-great-great grandson, William, full of all that Viking blood and testosterone, beat up the Brits in 1066 and was the first in the line of British monarchs that continues to this day. So one of Rollo's descendants is our very own Queen Elizabeth II.

Tomorrow is Maria's birthday. I am delighted that we will be able to spend it together, but I am concerned that I don't have a present for her. I have scoured the town but nothing brings inspiration unless I have grossly misjudged her and she is heavily into Norwegian knitwear.

Maria arrived, as planned, at about 1700, the only cloud on the horizon being a cloud on the horizon. Maria endured miserable weather for most of the three weeks she was on board last month. The day after she returned to London, the clouds melted away, the skies turned blue and we have been enjoying almost Mediterranean temperatures ever since. Within two hours of her arrival today, the skies clouded over and the temperature plummeted. Life can be cruel.

After the Hartley's took us out for a wonderful meal it was time to walk along to the Hurtigruten ferry terminal and bid them farewell. By now the weather was distinctly chilly. Getting back to the boat Maria, putting the kettle on, said: "When asked by Sue Lawley what luxury I would take to a desert island, I will ask for a hot water bottle"!

**15 August.** Maria's birthday and I awoke to the sound of pouring rain – the first for weeks. However, by the time Maria surfaced, the rain had cleared. Being presentless, I gave Maria my first solo watercolour. Cheap but a seemingly effective way of getting out of my embarrassing predicament.

We were due back in Ålesund in six days for Maria to fly back to London and Charles Gotto to join the boat, so this was an opportunity for us to properly explore the spectacular Geirangerfjorden which stretches for 50 miles inland, reputedly the most photographed fjord in Norway. Take in the branch to Tafjorden and this brings the round trip up to 125 miles. We were to take five days over the trip. The first leg would take us to the mouth of the fjord. Stops on the way were limited as the fjord is flanked by spectacular mountains which plummet almost vertically into the water. 25m out from the rock face and you have 100m of water under your keel – not ideal anchoring conditions. Anchorages down the fjord were therefore few and far between, but there was a promising looking bay at Glomset (62°27.774'N 006°37.187'E). It is, indeed, a lovely bay, anchoring in 14m but there is masses of swinging room. The sides of the bay were mainly woodland hiding the occasional holiday cottage. It is beautifully peaceful and the remoteness is emphasised by the sound of hooting owls after nightfall.

**16 August.** Dawn broke to the usual sounds when Maria is on board – persistent rain! We were in no rush; the anchorage was beautiful, so we spent a lazy day with Maria reading and me catching up on this record of the trip. Whilst we might have wished for better weather, the occasional lazy day when one can indulge oneself by reading without feeling guilty is a real luxury.

**17 August.** It was only when pulling the anchor up that I was made aware of the one drawback of this idyllic spot. Due to the 14m depth I had about 50m of chain out, all

of which was covered in glutinous foul smelling mud. Having washed the mud off the chain, the anchor, the anchor locker, the deck and off myself, we headed off for Tafjorden – the northern arm of the fjord.

Across one of the narrows were strung high voltage cables. The chart told me that the vertical clearance was no less than 60m, plenty of room for our 21m air draft – but Maria, the eternal pessimist, was sceptical. Even after getting me to recheck the vertical clearance a dozen times, she remained unconvinced. As we approached the cables I turned round and found Maria on the stern deck clutching a fender. As we were still about three hours from the nearest pontoon I asked what on earth she thought she was doing. Looking slightly embarrassed, she said “I’m getting ready to jump in the water when we hit the cables!”



**Maria at her “abandon ship” station**

Having just managed to squeeze under the wires with only 40m to spare, we eventually arrived at the end of Tafjord and tied up for the night against the visitors’ pontoon (62°14.2’N 007°25.2’E). The village of Tafjord rises from the waters edge up the hill. Some of the buildings at the higher end of the village are very old, but those near the waters edge were much newer. The reason for this is that in 1934 an enormous chunk of mountain fell into the fjord creating a tsunami which surged down the fjord and wiped out half the village with 40 killed. Maria was taking a close look at any suspect fracture lines in the rocks all the way up!

**18 August.** It is a year today that I broke my ankle in Salcombe. With half a Meccano kit inside, it is still in the process of recovering and until the strength is fully restored, I still have to be a bit careful on uneven ground. Not that I am particularly superstitious, I have been creeping around rather gingerly today, not wishing to tempt fate.

We were looking forward to continuing the journey along to Geiranger which was supposed to be the most beautiful part of the fjord and it did not disappoint. This branch of the fjord is spectacular with enormous mountains plunging straight into the water and dramatic waterfalls rushing the melt water from the still melting snow caps into the sea.



In those few very small areas where the mountain slope was less than 45 degrees you find an acre or two of pasture and a farm house perched precariously on the side of the mountain. Access to these fjord farms from the waters edge was by footholds cut into the rock and, where the rock face was absolutely vertical, ladders were attached. In the days when the government tax collector came for his dues he often found the ladders were missing – being “repaired” - leaving him empty handed. Impossible to carry supplies and produce to and from these farms, there is always a little storage hut and pontoon at the waters edge and a basket is winched on a cable up the mountainside. Most of the storage huts have the traditional grass roofs. Passing one, we saw a couple of goats had jumped from the steep rock onto the roof for an impromptu bit of grazing. Life for these farmers must have been as tough as it gets, scraping a meagre living from the scrap of hillside in the short summer and, in winter, living in fear of avalanches (which were frequent) wiping the entire smallholding off the mountainside.

Maria loves being on the boat but apart from competently dealing with the attachment of fenders and nipping ashore with mooring lines, her knowledge of sailing and the boat’s equipment is, shall we say, limited. Both she and I have always been very happy to leave everything to me, but I was aware that Maria really did



have to learn what to do in any emergency. To test the extent of her limitations, whilst Maria was contemplating the scenery and with the boat motoring along at 8 knots, I chucked a fender overboard and yelled “MAN OVERBOARD!”. Maria looked absolutely panic-stricken. “What do I do?” she shouted. “How can I tell you?” I replied, “I am already 50 yards away in the water, possibly unconscious”. Recalling my safety briefing with the Hartleys, she remembered to hit the MOB button which gives a tide adjusted fix back to that point. She then wrestled with the wheel for a few seconds before remembering that she needed to switch the autopilot off. She pretty quickly made her way back to the fender, using the MOB display, and remembered to put the engine in neutral before lying alongside it. Leaving the fender in the water, Maria then had some practice in manoeuvring under power. We were both happy with her performance, but I really must focus on a proper programme of instruction on different aspects in different conditions. I do not expect her to become a single-handed round-the-world helmswoman, but I would like a better than evens chance of being rescued if I were to go overboard.

Making the last turn in the fjord, the village of Geiranger opens up nestling at the waters-edge in the bowl of surrounding mountains. The trip up the fjord and an overnight stop at Geiranger is on the itinerary of the cruise ships which come to the area, but even these look small alongside the massive mountains.



### **Cruise ships dwarfed by the surrounding mountains**

We arrived at the village to find an extensive new pontoon for visiting yachts (62°06.1'N 007°12.2'E) with water and electricity for 100 NKR a night. The land surrounding the village is dedicated to fruit and berry production with an enormous variety of apple, pear and quince trees as well as many different kinds of berries. All the fresh food we bought in Norway, whether vegetable, fruit or seafood was absolutely delicious. Potatoes, carrots, strawberries, plums, shrimps – they all had far more flavour than is generally available in the UK. Their cheese, however, is rubbish. Sometimes we were lucky in finding some French camembert or something, but not often.



When you have been living on a boat for a period of time, you become very attuned to all the various noises and movements and you develop a sixth sense when anything isn't quite right. Tied to the pontoon, I was vaguely aware that the refrigeration compressor had kicked in but noticed that I wasn't hearing the accompanying noise of the coolant water draining overboard. Maria at the same time noticed that the temperature gauges for the fridge and freezer were rather higher than normal. I checked the water pump. The electric motor was whirring around but no water was being pumped through. I stripped the pump and found that the backing plate for the impeller was well worn, and suspected that this was the problem. I found an engineer on one of the tourist boats and hoped he might have a better idea and hopefully a solution. But he was no more familiar with the type of pump than I.

I was reminded of a definition of cruising as "fixing things in exotic locations". We had only 10 days of the cruise remaining, followed by the passage back to London and, rather than waste a couple of days trying to resolve the issue before the contents of the freezer defrosted, we decided to cut our losses. We would eat what we could from the freezer, and we would do without the luxury of refrigeration.

Maria took the opportunity to have a clean out of various bits of food in the fridge which looked suspect. By the evening, having spent most of the day stripping water pumps, I was feeling peckish. As a starter, I was particularly looking forward to the excellent foie gras that I had opened as a treat the day before the Hartley's left. There must be at least half left.... but it was nowhere to be seen. Maria had noticed a pot of what she thought was rather bland looking pate which had only been half eaten, and chucked it out. It was now at the bottom of the municipal rubbish tip. Oh well!

**19 August.** Having enjoyed a couple of relatively sunny days (amazing, given that Maria was on board), the morning dawned grey with low cloud. On a recce the previous evening, we had noticed at the top of the village an attractive modern building, which was an exhibition/museum on the fjord dwellers life, past and present. I say noticed, as it was tucked away without any signs to it, nor had we seen it advertised anywhere in the village. The Norwegians really do have a lot to learn about maximising their tourism revenue. It must have cost a fortune to build and it was opened with great pomp barely a year earlier by no less than the Queen of Norway herself. Not surprisingly, when we visited it, it was almost empty. Which was such a shame as it was a brilliant experience. Incredibly professionally put together and absolutely fascinating. Particularly impressive was the half hour 3D slide and film presentation. Well worth the visit.

Having had our MOB drill the previous day, I decided to continue the training programme by getting Maria to take the boat off the pontoon. We doubled the stern spring, let go the fore and aft breast ropes and Maria put the engine gently astern. By the time the bow had swung out, Maria had attracted a bit of an audience so, with great aplomb, she put the engine forward and eased away from the pontoon. Textbook!

Still with no wind, we motored back to the anchorage at Glomset for the night. On the way here, having seen some unusual porpoises with white-tipped fins (typically, the porpoises we had seen were black all over), today we saw some porpoises which were pink with black tips to their fins. Another curiosity of nature was noticing

phosphorescence in the water – the first I had experienced on the entire cruise (well, it may have been there, but you don't notice it in 24-hour sunlight).

**20 August.** Having raised anchor complete with foul-smelling mud again, we headed back to Ålesund to say goodbye once more to Maria, and to welcome Charles Gotto who is due to arrive tomorrow. Once again, there was no room on the visitors' pontoons, but we were happy to tie up along the fishermen's quay.



**On the fishermen's quay at Ålesund**

The principal objective at this point in the cruise is to make one's way south along the coast to a suitable jumping off point for the passage home. It would have been easy to overlook allocating a few days to explore one or more of the amazing fjords. I am glad that we found the time as the last few days have been a real highlight of the cruise.

But once again I am amazed that, during the five days making our way up and down one of the most spectacular cruising grounds in the world, we saw just one other sailing boat.

**21 August.** Norwegians (or the few visiting yachtsmen) do not go in for big flashy boats. During our entire time in Norway we had not seen a boat over 55ft – until today. I saw the mast of an approaching boat over the harbour wall. As it got closer, it got taller... and taller... and enormous. 52 metres of enormous to be precise. Eventually, in through the harbour entrance came the most amazingly beautiful yacht I had ever seen. "Cyclos" was 140ft of glistening sleek lines. Designed by Ron Holland, I was surprised to be told she was built by Royal Huisman 14 years ago. She looked as if she had only been taken out of the box last month. She was immaculate. Aluminium hulled, she had a permanent crew of 7 with accommodation

for 13 guests. Owned by “a German businessman” (whose small boat was, apparently, an equally impressive 90-footer) she had been cruising the fjords (they must have been selective about which ones with her 52m aircraft, given the number of bridges and overhead cables to negotiate), and the crew were preparing to take her back to Holland for her annual re-fit before heading across to the Caribbean for winter.



**“Cyclos” – so big I couldn’t fit all of her into the viewfinder**

Maria left on the coach to the airport, but not before packing what was left of the large lump of glacier ice in her baggage, well insulated in plastic, newspapers and an insulated bag. With the refrigeration gone, I was determined to preserve what we could of the booty for those very special occasions. It would have been an interesting conversation had Maria been stopped by Customs on the way into the UK!

**22 August.** It had been raining pretty much since we had left Gerainger a couple of days ago, but the skies parted long enough for us to scramble, with Charles Gotto (who flew in yesterday evening), up to the top of the hill overlooking Ålesund before Maria had to take the bus to the airport for her departure. It seemed strange that the next time I would see her would be back in London.

Charles and I left pretty much straight away on a 33-mile passage to stop just short of the notorious Statlandet for the night. The Statlandet is a promontory of land jutting out into the Norwegian Sea. Without the protection of the skerries, it had a reputation for wild conditions. On the way, we were being pursued by a large rain cloud. We kept just ahead of it and were treated to the most spectacular and complete rainbow of intense colour.



### **Spectacular rainbow – the intensity of the colours was incredible**

We had intended to use a harbour in the Norwegian Cruising Guide – Haugsholmen at 62°10.5'N 005°24'E, but it was horribly industrialised. However on a tiny island just north we found a quay by an old warehouse at 62°11.246'N 005°23.534' E. Very pretty and tranquil. Just coming in to tie up we saw an eagle at close quarters being harassed by gulls. That evening we were treated to an unusually beautiful sunset and we hoped this augured well for the weather tomorrow.



### **Red sky at night – sailors' delight?**

**23 August.** As foretold by last night's sunset, we awoke to brilliant warm sunshine, which reminded me that Maria had gone. We had 32 miles to cover to get round the Statlandet and on to Hamnaholmen on the island of Rugsundoe. As there had been no wind for two days, and none today either, again we had to motor the whole way, and all the Statlandet could throw at us was a rather pleasant long ocean swell. Hamnaholmen was a delightful little anchorage (61°52.58'N 005°13.15'E) but swinging room was restricted by buoyed fishtraps and what room was left was already occupied by motorsailer "Crazy Diamond". Owned by liveaboards Barry and Anne, it was one of only four British boats that I saw during the entire cruise. They had wintered the previous year in Iceland which they said was less spectacular than Norway but the people were a good deal more friendly. They suggested we tie up alongside the old ferry quay just outside the anchorage as it was now disused, the ferry service having been discontinued. This we did.

What we hadn't realised was that this stretch of water was the inland passage equivalent of the M4 with big ships passing to and fro. Their wakes did not represent too much of a problem until one of the big catamaran ferries charged past doing about 35 knots. His wake was like a tsunami bearing down on us – white crests and all. The wave hit us broadside, slamming us against the quay and rolling the boat through 30° which threatened to get our stanchions impaled in the lorry tyre wall and rip them out. Such was the wash that it bounced off the rock face half a mile away and came back at us, so we had a second offering five minutes later. We reckoned that this was the last ferry of the day so we didn't go to the hassle of laying an anchor abeam to hold us off the quay.

As one moves further south, one becomes aware that birds which had been common before, are now no longer to be seen. We had seen a lot of Arctic terns and kittiwakes further north but I noticed that we had not had the pleasure of their company for a few days now. We did however see a peregrine falcon which we had not seen before.

**24 August.** Poor Charles was desperate. He is a keen sailor and had come all this way and we hadn't had the sails up yet. We had planned a shortish 25 mile passage today to Rognaldsvågen (61°33.7'N 004°47.3'E) so, in a very light NE wind we got the cruising chute up, pursuing "Crazy Diamond" who had left about half an hour before us. We eventually had to give up when the wind died completely. As we were stationary, we chucked out the fishing line to catch some dinner but had no luck on this occasion.

Rognaldsvågen is a charming little fishing community. We entered on the south side (the north harbour, separated by a low bridge, now has some small visitors pontoons – 80 NKR - but there was insufficient room for us) and tied up alongside the fish factory quay. We met the very depressed owner, who said there would not be a problem as he had had to close the factory about a year ago as business was so bad. We felt rather sorry for him. We went for a walk round the little island and started chatting to a young woman and her father. It transpired that they were Dutch. The local community has to keep the inhabitants above a minimum number (winter population of 120) otherwise the subsidised ferry services to the mainland, which are their lifeline, are withdrawn. So the locals had placed an advertisement in Holland inviting people to emigrate to this lovely but isolated spot. This Dutch family had arrived a couple of years ago and now seemed well settled.

We then bumped into the local shopkeeper who, by Norwegian standards, was very friendly. He took our order for freshly baked bread for the following morning.

**25 August.** We walked round to the shop and, sure enough, there were our two loaves, warm from the oven, awaiting our collection. We having bought some other provisions, the shopkeeper invited us to join him for a coffee. He proved to be a fount of local knowledge. For instance, he told us that local communities like this are being threatened because their harbours are now too small for modern fishing boats, hence the demise of the fish factory. Increasingly, the Norwegians are turning to fish farming as a principal industry (salmon, trout and now experimenting with cod). Most of the fishing boats that we see which look very fully laden have not been trawling, but are transporting fish from the farms. They are kept in the ships holds in artificially oxygenated water so that they arrive at the market quays still alive. It was



great finding a Norwegian who was keen to volunteer information rather than just politely respond with the minimum necessary to answer a specific question.

Our next destination was Kjerringvågen (61°04.378'N 004°52.854'E) and, on the way here, we saw no fewer than five white-tailed eagles. Kjerringvågen is a beautiful landlocked anchorage, albeit in 20m of water, so we put out almost 80m of chain and ran the anchor chum down the chain to reduce our swinging circle. On arrival, it started to rain.

**26 August.** It was still raining, and although it was tempting to have a lazy day in this lovely spot, we had to press on if we were to have time to explore the Hardangerfjorden at the weekend. So off we set with the wind, such as it was, bang on the nose, so a boring and wet motor for most of the day through a, frankly, uninspiring landscape – mainly low barren islands. Approaching Grunnesundet, our destination, we passed the holiday homes of the burghers of Bergen. Very neat. Very twee. The entrance to the anchorage in Grunnesundet (60°40.6'N 005°05.3'E) is extremely narrow and almost completely blocked by rocks but, with Charles in the bow conning me in very close to the starboard side of the entrance, we made it without incident, placing our anchor one side of the tiny inlet and taking a line ashore at the stern. The anchorage was picture-book beautiful – rocky knolls covered in heather, bracken and small shrubs. It looked like it had been designed by a landscape architect.

**27 August.** We were now getting used to waking to the sound of persistent rain. And once again the light wind was bang on the nose. Our plan was to reach Kviturdspollen at 60°16'N 005°14.7'E, the home of the Bergen yacht club. But as our passage continued, the rain became harder and harder until we were just off Bergen itself at which point we threw the towel in and diverted into the great metropolis, and I am glad we did. Despite the fact that it rains here 260 days of the year (five days out of seven) and is wetter than Fort William, Bergen is a lovely city. The rain, miraculously, stopped for about an hour so we took advantage and rode the funicular railway up to the top of the high hills behind the city and enjoyed the views until, inevitably, everything was once again shrouded in low rain-bearing cloud.



**Bergen – a beautiful but indescribably wet city**

They have preserved a whole row of the original wooden trading houses along the waterfront, all painted different colours. They also have an excellent outdoor market, the stalls mainly selling fish and all different types of seafood, or Norwegian knitwear. Mysteriously, all of the fish stalls were run by Spaniards, not a Norwegian in sight – I never did find out why. We bought some shrimps and cooked them as an aperitif before going out for dinner. We found a restaurant serving bacalao but this was extremely disappointing compared to the one I had at Ringholmen. It was incredibly salty.



**The old quarter of Bergen**



**.... and the fishmarket**

**28 August.** Still bucketing down with rain but the wind had swung round to the west and increased at last. Poor Charles had not only endured almost non-stop rain since his arrival but after almost a week we had had the sails up for a total of about four hours and nothing much over a Force 2. We quickly went ashore and bought crabs and traditional Norwegian fishcakes made from catfish and haddock, and Charles invested in a Norwegian sweater. Not wishing to miss out on the wind, we set off for Godøysund in a brisk Force 7 with terrific gusts. With a well reefed main and yankee, we screeched along, Charles helming the whole way – at last!



**At last Charles gets some wind**

Coming into the sound we found that the pontoons by the hotel were completely taken up by dozens of Princess motor-cruisers who had come here for a very wet rally, so we anchored in a tiny little pool (60°04.18'N 005°34.084'E), taking a line ashore to a tree.

**29 August.** 53 years old today and I was expecting the event to go unnoticed, but I was delighted to wind up the SSB email to find a birthday message from my parents. Charles then bounded out of his cabin with birthday greetings and a selection of cards and presents from the family which he had brought out with him.

We had allocated two days to see something of Hardangerfjord before getting to our final destination of Haugesund, and today we were to make our way up the fjord to Nordheimsund (60°22.4'N 006°08.8'E). It was still spotting with rain but a great deal better than the last few days. Apart from the wonderful scenery we also saw a number of porpoises on the way up the fjord. At Nordheimsund we found brand new pontoons and a complex still being constructed with loos, showers, laundrettes etc for visiting yachts (perhaps one or two a week for the six week summer season !?). From the pontoon there is a great outlook over the bay with a large glacier covering the mountains behind. Lovely, but I have to say not a patch on Geirangerfjord. But Nordheimsund is worth a detour if only to visit the boatyard which restores old wooden boats. Innovatively, to supplement their income, they have opened the yard up to tourists.

So a special birthday dinner, cooked by the man who runs some of the finest foody pubs in London. After the days of rain, we needed some comfort food, and comfort food Charles delivered. A sensational corned beef hash with baked beans and fried eggs on top. What a way to end the day!



**The gastronomic climax to my birthday**

**30 August.** A trip to Nordheimsund is not complete without walking the couple of kilometres down the road to the spectacular waterfall that you can walk right behind. Back on the boat after our bit of exercise, we headed south down the fjord on our penultimate day together and a long 45 mile leg to Leivik (59°46.8'N 005°30.4'E). Fate had decided that one day's sailing was enough for Charles and the wind had died again, so it was a motor all the way albeit amidst wonderful scenery. Leivik itself is a dull town but at least the sun came out in the evening – the first time for four days.

**31 August.** Our final leg and only 23 miles to Haugesund. I had been getting synoptic charts of the North Sea via the SSB radio for the last few days to see what weather we might expect for the long passage home and it was looking disturbingly like light headwinds to begin with, followed by complete calm. It even occurred to me that we might have to motor most of the way back, so I was pleased to find a fuel pontoon at the entrance to the harbour to fill up the tanks.

At Haugesund (59°24.8'N 005°15.9'E) the quayside travels down the entire length of the town and there is masses of room to tie up alongside (avoid mooring by the rails painted yellow and white (as opposed to yellow only) as these spaces are for the ferries). Charles took a taxi to the airport for his flight home. I was feeling almost guilty that his 10 days with me had been characterised by heavy rain and little or no wind – not that I could have done much about it, but it was a great shame. Nevertheless he insisted that it had been an epic trip for him.

I had a day to get the boat ready for Richard Gaunt and Laurence Wells who were flying out to join me for the final 550 mile passage home. Even though nothing much in the way of wind was forecast, I didn't want a repeat performance of the dinghy coming adrift again, so I put the outboard on the pushpit bracket and lashed the dinghy to the davits with a complex arrangement of lines, to the point where it couldn't move one centimetre in any direction.

**1 September.** Richard and Laurence arrived **in** good spirits and **with** good spirits, two bottles of gin and two of whisky to be precise – although they had already made inroads into one of the bottles of gin. I had persuaded the local fish stall owner (another Spaniard) to give me a large amount of ice for the freezer, but as it smelt strongly of fish it probably wasn't the best additive for G&T's!

We had decided to leave this evening rather than the early hours of tomorrow to benefit from what wind there was before it died away completely. So after an enormous bowl of garlicky fresh prawns (the quid pro quo for the ice), at 2115 we slipped our moorings for the last time in Norway and headed for home. On the way out of Haugesund, we passed a nondescript island no more than 1½ miles across. It was Utsire of Shipping Forecast fame.

In only 8 or 9 knots of WSW wind were able to maintain our course of 196° albeit rather slowly. In the early hours of the morning, as had been forecast, we got steadily headed as the wind slowly backed to the south and, by breakfast time, we were heading for Denmark on a course of 145°. The wind was picking up nicely (an unforecast pleasure), albeit from the wrong direction and at 1000 we put in a tack

and started heading for Newcastle. At least we were now heading for the right country!

Although heading for the border country, it was extraordinarily pleasant sailing, maintaining about 7 knots boat speed in slight seas watching the aerobatics of the fulmars and gannets. After 30 hours we saw our first ship – indeed we heard our first ship, as the VHF crackled into action as the “Viking” called us to establish whether we intended maintaining our course and speed as she was towing several kilometres of seismic equipment. Whilst on the air, the Viking gave us the latest weather forecast for the area – S veering SW and weakening.

By breakfast time on 3 September, 33 hours into our passage, we crossed the international boundary. Albeit on a latitude just a few miles south of Aberdeen, we were now closer to the UK than to Norway!

The wind remained absolutely constant at just E of S and we were maintaining a satisfactory 7 knots of boat speed. At dusk, we were about 80 miles NE of Newcastle and put in a tack. If the wind started moving W of S as forecast, we would be laying our course. And this is precisely what happened except of course, the other forecast event, the dying of the wind, also happened. By breakfast time on 4 September, boat speed was down to below 4 knots. We threw in the towel and turned the engine on. But we had had far more sailing than we had originally expected so we couldn't complain. Richard had brought his camcorder along with a view to making a documentary of the epic struggle across the North Sea, so much of the day was taken with Richard taking shots of himself in a variety of heroic poses, as he had by this time given up on the acting abilities of both Laurence and me.



**Producer, director... and star!**



During the night of 3 September we passed through the oil fields to the north of Norfolk, still motoring in absolutely flat seas. It really is quite a sight to see these vast structures, lit up like Blackpool, just sticking out of the sea. All of a sudden, having seen no shipping at all for three days (apart from the Viking) the sea seemed to be crammed with ships just sort of meandering around at tickover speeds. With all the background lights of the oil platforms, it was actually quite difficult to pick out a meandering ship amongst them.

On one occasion, we had a fishing boat coming up behind us, approaching our starboard quarter, on an almost, but not quite, parallel course. He didn't have any lights indicating that he was trawling or anything and, according to the international collision regulations (Colregs), he ought to pass us on our starboard side. He was not travelling a great deal faster than us, so the situation developed rather slowly. As Richard said, "Don't worry Tim, it won't be more than a glancing blow!" I don't normally muck about with working boats. If we are on collision course, I normally change course whether I am technically stand-on vessel or not, and allow the other vessel to continue on its way without altering course. But in this case, it was difficult to know what to do without positively confusing the fishing vessel or placing us in an even more vulnerable position. We waited patiently for him to alter course to starboard. He was getting closer and closer. I considered altering course to port. If he was aware of me and abided by the Colregs, he would alter course to starboard and that would have been the correct course of action, but he had shown no indication that he had spotted me at all, and a move by me to port would have brought me right under his bows. If I moved to starboard I would be moving right into the path of where he should by rights be altering course to himself. I started playing a megatorch on our stern, mast, and the water between us and no response. We tried to call him on the VHF and no response. Before I took positive avoiding action by swinging to port, and against all the text book procedures, in desperation I flashed the torch directly at his bridge. Immediately, I saw a light flick on on the bridge and suddenly he veered sharply, not to starboard as he should have done, but to port, directly across my wake. He can't have been more than about 40 yards away. It's just as well I hadn't also swung to port to avoid collision. Lessons to be learned: Don't assume that there is an effective watch being kept on a vessel, even in comparatively crowded waters, and don't assume that the approaching vessel has the first idea about the Colregs.

Round about this time, the connection between our GPS and the chartplotter, which had been getting increasingly flaky and unreliable, decided to pack up completely. This was not a significant problem as we still had the electronic charts working fine, and we still had our GPS position which I could manually plot on to the electronic chart. We also had our original black and white chartplotter as a back up. But it was a nuisance as we were about to enter the tortuous channels of the Thames estuary. So I spent an hour or so programming the GPS directly with the waypoints, which would show up on one of the cockpit displays and this was an effective solution.

By this time we had our eye on the clock. If we managed to follow the tide up the Thames, we should arrive at St Katherine Docks by 1900. If we didn't catch the fair tide we would arrive after 2000 and too late to lock in to the Dock until the following morning. So we increased the revs to cruise at 8 knots rather than my normal motoring speed of 7½ knots.

Whilst this was my third trip up the Thames, the excitement of passing under the QEII bridge, going through the Thames barrier, passing the Millennium Dome, Greenwich and Canary Wharf and arriving at Tower Bridge in the heart of London doesn't fade. And for Laurence and Richard the novelty value was considerable.



### **Coming up the Thames – an unforgettable experience**

As predicted we arrived on the dot of 1900 and locked in to the dock, greeted by Maria and my son, Peter, who considerably brought along a bottle of champagne. Just as well. I had started the voyage three months ago with 150 litres of wine on board. We were down to our last 4 litres!



### **The reception committee replenishes our dwindled wine cellar**

Ten years in the dreaming; four months in the planning; three months almost to the day on board; 3633 miles under the keel. Electric storms; tows by the RNLI; 30 hour gales; an (almost) 200 mile day; passage into the Arctic circle to a cruising ground that is as spectacular as it is deserted. Wow!!! And now I have to get off and rejoin, as everybody put it, the real world – or is it? Discovering my new world of birds, fish

and wild flowers; slowly getting to know and understand a culture wholly dependent on nature; witnessing at first hand the wonderful architecture of mountains, glaciers, and the fjords they have created has opened my eyes. Right now, I no longer see the teeming metropolis which has been my life for the last fifty years as being the natural order. Rather, it seems to be a sophisticated fabrication, full of violence, politics and spin. It will take a while readjusting. What is for certain is that the lure of the seas to cross, and the promise of coastlines and cultures to explore is now even stronger than it was and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to get this far. People refer to my “retirement”. It is not retirement, it is advancement. It is a liberation. It is the start of a new chapter and this has been only the beginning. To be continued.....

## APPENDICES

### The Boat

Mina<sup>2</sup> is an Oyster 485 designed by Holman and Pye and built in Wroxham, Norfolk in 1997. “Mina” is Argentine slang for a beautiful and curvaceous temptress.

**LOA:** 50’  
**LWL:** 39’1”  
**Beam:** 14’  
**Draft:** 2.18m  
**Displacement** 18,600 kgs (41,000 lbs)

### Top Ten Places

1. Enga (66°42.5'N 013°42.85'E). (Snout of the Svartisen glacier). Exploring the glacier is an almost spiritual experience. Not to be missed on any account.
2. Geirangerfjord. There is a good reason why this is the “most photographed fjord in Norway”. Spectacular.
3. Steine (69°10.1'N 016°31.7'E). Anchorage in a small cluster of rocks 10 miles from the nearest land. Covered with birds. Exceptional.
4. Aesoya anchorage (68°06.163'N 013°48.42'E). Picture book pretty with small sandy beach.
5. Nusfjord (60°02.06'N 013°21.06'E). The loveliest of the Lofoten fishing villages.
6. Straumshamm (68°06.4'N 015°22.3'E). Beautiful and wild anchorage complete with eagles.
7. Villa Havn (64°32.7'N 010°42.4'E). In the skerries with terrific view from the top of the hill.
8. Torghatten (mountain with the hole in the middle). Anchorage 20 minutes walk away is Moihavn (65°24.6'N 012°07'E)
9. Renga (66°36'N 013°06'E). Delightful secluded anchorage.
10. Grunnesundet (60°40.6'N 005°05.3'E). Tiny landlocked anchorage as if designed by landscape architect.

**Planning.** When I first met John Duff in January (who took his boat to Lofoten a couple of years ago), he was horrified to hear that I had only just started planning the cruise. He said he had devoted two or three days a week from November to June and that was only just enough time. I planned the trip from February to June. During that time I had the distraction of a major refit of Mina<sup>2</sup> and lost a week or three when my laptop and all electronic charts were stolen. By the time I left, I had ticked off most of the literally hundreds of items on my “to do” list and felt I had covered most of the angles, but I had been working on the project pretty much full time. The considerable amount of preparation paid dividends however, and allowed me to enjoy the cruise rather than having to sort out problems or try and source bits of kit I had forgotten.

**Watch system.** For all three long passages (London - Shetland; Shetland-Lofoten; Haugesund-London) I had three crew including myself. I use a three watch system; three hours on and six hours off. This has a number of advantages; I find at nights that three hours is a more comfortable period than the conventional four hours. With

a long six hour break between watches, you can get plenty of sleep if you want it but, in practice, the off-going watch tends to hang around for a while, chatting to the incoming watch and, similarly, the incoming watch tends to arrive on deck an hour or so before he/she formally takes over the watch, so one does not tend to spend too much time on one's own.

**Norwegian Customs clearance.** Technically, one should clear customs at the first port of entry into Norway. I have heard nightmare stories of boats with supplies of wine and beer to cover the duration of the cruise being presented with a duty demand by Norwegian Customs so massive that they had no alternative but to tip all their booze overboard. The owners of Crazy Diamond whom we met, cleared customs at Bergen. They had to fill in forms detailing every single thing on board, right down to their last sachet of Cup-a-Soup. They were told that they would have to pay duty on all their booze or have it all taken off the boat and sealed up in bond (the storage for which they had to pay). When they were leaving the country, they could go back and reclaim it subject to handing over a large deposit, returnable when evidence was provided by their Customs counterparts that the boat had arrived at their non-Norwegian destination. If, as in my case, your port of arrival is a small fishing village in Lofoten, you will find it very difficult to find a customs officer to clear you in.

**Communications.** I have an ICOM-M710 SSB radio for longer range communications. This is used for email communications using Sailmail ([www.SailMail.com](http://www.SailMail.com)). The SailMail Association is a non-profit association of yacht owners that operates and maintains a network of private coast stations in the Maritime Mobile Radio Service. The \$250 annual membership fee enables you to have unlimited use of the service anywhere in the world. But being clunky compared with land-based internet services, it is appropriate only for shortish (less than two pages) emails and no attachments, so sending photos or spreadsheets etc is not possible. SailMail do ask members to restrict their usage to an average of no more than about ten minutes a day which I found to be sufficient for my requirements. Apart from the SSB radio one also has to have a PactorII modem produced by SCS of Germany which costs about £600.

**Internet.** Internet access is more difficult to find in Norway than most other places in Europe. Many tourist information shops (if the town was large enough to have one) had a terminal you could use. Likewise central post offices and public libraries in the larger towns.

**Mobile phones.** Reception is excellent almost everywhere along the coast as they put their antennae on the tops of mountains. So if you set your mobile up for "roaming" you have no problem except that you get charged quite a bit for both incoming and outgoing calls. I am told the smart way of dealing with this is to buy a Norwegian pay-as-you-go SIM card and then use the Onetel (or equivalent service) Norwegian access number. Then all outgoing calls to almost anywhere in the world are 38p a minute which is bearable.

**Weather forecasts.** To be honest, having got to Norway, I tended not to bother with weather forecasts as I couldn't see much point. The winds, particularly up north, tend to be lighter than on the UK coast. Normally they follow the coast in one direction or



the other so either the wind is bang on the nose or right behind you. Apart from four stretches of only a few miles, the entire coastline is protected by outlying skerries so big seas are not an issue even in strongish winds (indeed, being able to blast along in almost flat water is one of the great attractions of this coastline). And one is rarely more than a few miles from a safe haven so, should some unexpected and worrying weather spring up, you are rarely more than an hour away from complete protection. On the passages, I used VHF radio to pick up UK shipping forecasts; Navtex, and the SSB radio to receive synoptic charts from the Royal Navy at Northwood. The software I used was Mscan Meteo which connects and tunes through the PactorII modem.

### **The Spelling and Pronunciation of Place Names**

There is seemingly no standardisation of the spelling of place names in Norway which leads to confusion when trying to identify places on the chart which have been mentioned in pilot books or elsewhere.

First of all, pronunciation: “å” is pronounced “or” and, alternatively, is spelt “aa”, eg Ålesund, also spelt Aalesund, is pronounced “Orlessoond”.

“ø” is pronounced “ur” and is sometimes spelt “oe”, eg, Bodø is also spelt Bodoë and pronounced “Boodur”.

When it comes to harbours, things get even more confusing. There are several words for Harbour: -havn, -holmen, -holm, -homen, -hamn and (I think) -håg, all of which seem to be interchangeable. Likewise a sound can end in -sund, -sundet or -sunnet. I never did crack it.

**Charts and navigation.** The Norwegian Hydrographic Service has an excellent series of 1:50,000 charts covering the entire coastline. Only problem is that you need well in excess of 100 charts to cover the whole coast. An alternative was to go electronic. Being of the old school, I felt rather nervous about this. But using C-Map chips and Raymarine Navigator chartplotter software on my PC turned out to be absolutely fantastic. The entire coast is completely rock-strewn and having your GPS position and track displayed at all times with the ability to range in to incredible levels of detail to go through tortuous channels was brilliant. Nearest tide and current information was displayed graphically at the press of a button, together with other information about individual ports etc. In fair weather (most of the time) I had the chartplotter in the cockpit. The back up, in case the PC or software failed, was the 7-year old black and white chartplotter. And if that failed, I had a couple of large scale charts and sufficient pilot books to get us into a safe haven using traditional skills. The Norwegian Cruising Guide is about the only pilot book for the area written with cruising sailing boats in mind. Generally reliable but, although updated periodically, some of the data can be out of date. The Den Norske Los series of pilot books is also useful, particularly the aerial photographs of harbours, but only some of the volumes are translated into English, and they are expensive. Borrow them if you can.

**Medical and First Aid.** Both Maria and I went on a First Aid course (and Sea Survival course), part of which advised on the sort of supplies to take with us. Only a handful of places we visited were large enough to have a chemist so, apart from all the usual contents of a first aid kit, I also had on board medication to cover almost any of the little ailments which, without treatment, can make life uncomfortable; for

instance, treatments for eye sties, mouth ulcers, indigestion, constipation, diarrhoea, haemorrhoids, athletes foot, loose tooth fillings and so on. We had Stugeron in plentiful supply and we also got through a surprising amount of sun tan cream

**Food and other provisions.** Unless you are happy living off a diet of pizza, eating out in Norway is an expensive business and, on my budget, was restricted to the occasional treat. So we loaded the boat with sufficient food for most of our requirements for the duration. Pasta and sauces, tinned ham, rice and curry sauces, pots of pate, tins of everything from confit de canard, olives and asparagus to mixed bean salads and red kidney beans. Not to mention all the English bits and pieces that foreigners don't understand: Colman's mustard, horseradish sauce, Worcestershire sauce, Branston pickle, tea bags etc. We are lucky enough to have a freezer on board, and this was stocked with stews for the passages, bacon, sausages, steaks, chicken, mince (and, latterly, 4,000 year old glacier ice!).

In Norway, it is difficult to buy any fresh meat at all (and the occasion when we found some, it turned out to be very expensive and completely putrid). Their bread, fresh fruit and vegetables are all, however, absolutely delicious.

At least twice a week we ate fish, straight out of the sea. Normally saithe, called sei in Norway (aka coley or coal fish), or cod (torsk in Norwegian), but occasionally redfish and mackerel. Saithe and cod are delicious but need something to go with them, eg cooked in a tomato, onion and garlic sauce, and served with rice or boiled potatoes (I don't know what potatoes the Norwegians grow but they are absolutely delicious)

**Fishing.** You can buy a reel of fishing line with hooks almost everywhere in Norway for a cost of about £10. The hooks have lures attached so no bait required. We found we caught most fish on a gently shelving bottom at a depth of between 40 and 100 metres. Look to see where the local small boats are fishing, and try close by... they probably know the best places. Saithe and cod are bottom feeders, so when the boat is absolutely stationary, let the line run out until it hits the bottom, pull it up a couple of feet and then give it a series of sharp tugs. Normally, you are pulling in dinner within about five minutes and quite often three or four fish on the same line. If you have had no luck after about 10 minutes you are probably in the wrong place, so move on and try again. Gut the catch, fillet them (but not on teak decks - it makes a right mess) and chuck them in the pan. Delicious!

## **Stores**

**Fender board.** A fender board is essential as, more often than not, one is tying up alongside a fishing boat quay with truck tyres slung down the side. Be careful when the tide rises not to get fenders or fender board trapped under the tyres. If the tide is going to be rising overnight or when you are off the boat for an extended period, you need to calculate the fall and rise and position the fender board appropriately.

**Gas.** Norway only has propane, whereas most UK boats use butane. So you will not only need to buy a propane cylinder, but also a propane regulator, available from almost any Statoil petrol station and costing a total of £100. Apart from the extortionate cost, there were two further points of irritation.

The Norwegian propane cylinders are wider than their UK equivalent and about 2mm too wide to fit into my gas locker, so I had to lash it to the pushpit and jam open the gas locker top to allow passage of a rubber tube to connect to the gas input. The second irritation was that until last year (2003) you could, prior to leaving Norway, cash-in your Statoil cylinder but they have now stopped doing this. In the event, I sweet-talked a garage owner to give me some money for my now useless cylinder, but he was a little reluctant.

**Diesel.** There were sufficient places with accessible diesel pumps for there not to be a problem. However, a lot of these are unmanned credit card pumps and most of these only accepted Norwegian credit cards - Visa, Mastercard or Amex didn't work. Sometimes, there would be a shop alongside who could override the pump and you pay in the shop. Otherwise, there would be an emergency telephone number on the pump and someone would come down and sort it out for you.

**Fresh water hosepipe.** I took along a hosepipe (folding one in a cassette), but in the event never had need to use it - most places had taps and hoses.

**Chandlery and other spares.** The few chandlers we came across were not really geared up for sailing boats, so you want to have sufficient spares of most things on board so you can be self-sufficient regardless of what breaks or needs replacing.

**Anchoring.** The coast has a large number of the most beautiful anchorages imaginable, but some do not have a lot of swinging room, particularly if the anchorage is quite deep. We did on a couple of occasions take a line ashore and tie it to a boulder or tree. Many anchorages also have iron cleats buried into shore-side rocks, their location marked with a bullseye painted on the rock. We also had with us an **anchor chum** (or buddy or sentinel), a very large, heavy lump of metal which you put over your anchor chain and lower down to the bottom. This has the effect of pinning you on a much shorter scope and dramatically reducing your turning circle. It worked extremely well once deployed but it was incredibly awkward to get it on to the chain and recover again - I would have difficulty doing it on my own.

### **Crew logistics**

Getting to and from the boat was not easy for some of my guests - and not cheap. For some reason I can't work out single airfares are much more expensive than return airfares. So if you were flying into one place but leaving from another place, you were looking at having to pay two return fares or taking a ferry back to the point of arrival for the return trip. Also, travelling from London to Lofoten involved no fewer than three planes. Many itineraries included a change of plane at Oslo. Some guests took a day or two out in Oslo to sightsee. Maria and Peter then took the train from Oslo to Bodø rather than flying, to see more of the country. A great trip by their account. Specialist travel agents provide a service for mariners getting them to and from their vessels on concessionary, flexible, one way tickets with a greater than standard baggage allowance. The agent I was put in touch with was Dick Andreou at Interargo ([dick@interargo.com](mailto:dick@interargo.com)). Competitive if one is talking about one way flights to out of the way places, but you can probably do it cheaper with a bit of internet work if the journey is less complicated. You have to provide the crews travelling on

these concessionary tickets with official looking letters from the Master of the vessel, instructing them to embark at a particular place on a particular date, showing their full name and their position on the crew (navigator, engineer, cook or whatever).

#### **Unsung heroes .....**

**Electronic charts vs paper charts.** As above, I have been completely won over by the electronic alternative.

**Electric winch for mainsail controls.** I had this put on in the winter. With a four part tackle for the main sheet going to the end of a long boom, the prospect of hand-grinding miles of sheet to jibe the sail is enough to put you off the manoeuvre entirely. Likewise, reefing the main into the mast is a sweat inducing struggle in anything other than light airs. Now, at the press of a button, it is all done in double quick time. No fuss. No sweat. Brilliant.

**Boom preventer lines.** The idea was Alex Busher's (Oyster Brokerage who sold the boat to me). A line each side of the boom, secured at the aft end and cleated on the boom close to the gooseneck. When required, there is no fiddling about hanging over the side of the boat in a rolling sea to attach things to the after end of the boom; simply uncleat from the gooseneck end and clip on to the permanently rigged line which leads through a block in the bow, and back to a jammer by the cockpit. When you jibe, simply detach the bow line from the boom line and reattach to the boom line on the other side. Easy peezy.

**Musto Goretex ankle boots.** I bought these not least because I was still recovering from a broken ankle and these boots provided a degree of ankle support. However they did a great deal more than that. So long as you are not on the foredeck knee deep in green water, with these there is no need to wear sea boots in any conditions. The water from wet weather trousers flows down the outside of them rather than trickling into them and not once did my feet get even remotely damp.... even through 30 hours of gales. They also look reasonable enough to wear ashore.

**Canon Ixus Digital Camera.** Small enough to slip into a shirt pocket, I took hundreds of shots, and downloaded them on to my laptop. Delete the duff ones, and view the others for instant gratification. I used to copy photos onto a CD and give it to departing guests as a memento of their time on the boat.

**Autopilot.** A bit of kit that works hard day in and day out and is completely taken for granted until it goes wrong (which it didn't). Having to hand-steer all day whilst motoring, or in stormy conditions with green stuff being dumped on you doesn't bear thinking about.

**Whispergen generator.** New technology Stirling cycle external combustion engine. It works like any other generator insofar as it produces electricity to recharge the batteries so you don't have to sit in a quiet anchorage with the main engine hammering away for four hours a day. But the Whispergen operates almost completely silently. It turns itself on when battery capacity

falls below a certain level, and turns itself off again when the batteries are topped up. Absolutely fantastic - when it is working (see below)

### ... and the duffers

**Whispergen generator.** Brilliant when it worked, but to begin with it was totally unreliable, which nearly sent me mad. It took someone from Whispergen to fly all the way up to Lofoten (at their expense) to properly sort it out. Having had it installed, I have heard that lack of reliability is a common complaint from owners. It will teach me not to embrace technology until it is tried and tested and has properly proven itself in a marine environment.

**Raymarine ST80 instrumentation.** Introduced in the mid-90's, this was the top of the range all-singing-and-dancing instrumentation of choice. Only problem was that it was so sophisticated, it was and remained notoriously unreliable. To make matters worse, because it was such a nightmare for Raymarine, they stopped supporting it last year. The depth instrument gave up the ghost over 100 metres. Not normally a problem but, on this coast, you can be quite close inshore in 150 metres of water but with the instrument suddenly displaying 2 metres and falling fast. Could be unnerving. The wind speed worked, but the wind direction didn't. Not that I needed to know the wind direction but it would have been helpful for less experienced guests.

**Gill Key West Salopettes.** Brand new wet weather gear, bought because the trousers on my 10 year old salopettes leaked round the bottom. Rather irritating, therefore, to find that the brand new ones did as well.

### List of birds.

In terms of identifying birds, I am a complete amateur but had a great deal of pleasure in learning. There were many birds we saw that I was not positively able to identify, so this list includes only those species I **know** I saw:

Guillemot	Greylag goose	Cuckoo
Black Guillemot	Mallard	Shag
Razorbill	Pintail duck	Grey Heron
Puffin	Hooded Crow	Pigeon
Skylark	Raven	(also, we heard owls
Arctic Tern	Arctic Skua	but didn't see them)
Common Tern	Ptarmigan	
Gannet	White-tailed Eagle	
Fulmar	Golden Eagle	
Great Black Backed	Osprey	
Gull	Peregrine Falcon	
Lesser Black Backed	Ringed Plover	
Gull	Velvet Scoter	
Herring Gull	Red-breasted	
Common Gull	merganser	
Northern Wheatear	Pied wagtail	
Eider Duck	Reed bunting	

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