

## A NORWEGIAN CRUISING EXPERIENCE

Casually looking up from the airport coach as it stopped to let off some passengers on the outskirts of Oslo, I saw a car approach the roundabout ahead and turn off towards the city centre. It was towing a beautifully finished wooden boat, which one could not help but notice and admire. Normally one recognises a Wayfarer instantly from any distance, let alone 75 metres, but probably because I was so taken with its beautifully finished top deck and newly painted hull, it took me a few seconds to realize it must be Wilhelm Munthe-Kaas on his way to meet me at the coach terminal.

I had met Wilhelm the previous summer at his holiday -hytteø (cabin) on the shoreline of one of the many islands near Kragerø. He had mentioned that it was his ambition to cruise -Blunderbusø ó the Wayfarer he had bought from the renowned UK cruisers, Roger and Diane Aps ó along the west coast of Norway, just below the Arctic Circle. It was an area he had briefly visited on a cruise to Iceland in a yacht, and had always vowed to return to explore it in greater depth. I had readily offered to crew for him ó being Wayfarer International secretary, I obviously felt it was obligation to do so!!

Wilhelm had been impressed with the Harken jib furling system I had on my boat when he had visited me in the Spring, and I had brought along the same system for Blunderbus. As there was a very long drive to our destination however, Wilhelm had decided not to spend time fitting this on the boat before our departure, and we headed straight off to Brønnøysund from the coach terminus. Wilhelm was determined not to waste any time in getting to our destination to start our Norwegian cruise.

*On the road beyond Trondheim around 30 minutes past midnight, with the sun about to dip below horizon and the mist from the valley we are about to descend into, just showing above the tree line.*



Wilhelm eventually stopped for a rest in the early hours of the next morning. Awake again after 4 or 5 hours fitful sleep, we made use of the lay-by facilities to freshen up before continuing our journey northwards. Around mid morning we turned off the main inland route towards the coast road. The whole route had been scenic, and this part was particularly so. We arrived at Holm at a convenient time to catch a ferry, one of many that cross the fjords cutting deeply into the coastline along this road.

We didn't reach Brønnøysund until late in the afternoon, where we first stocked up with food from the local supermarket before finding the marina to launch the boat.

*Wilhelm (standing on pontoon in red jacket) after launching boat at the Marina and preparing to load all the gear for our 2-week trip.*

*The view is looking north into the direction we are about to sail.*



*Wilhelm holding the outboard - all other items of gear used on the trip are laid out on the pontoon. (Picture taken after our return).*



*All our gear stowed immediately prior to our departure. The crash hat was in fact worn only once during the trip - on our only day's sailing into a strong headwind.*

It was gone 18.30 by the time we had packed the boat for our 2 week cruise, which would have been far too late to set off on any trip in the UK, but with nearly 24 hours of daylight this near the Arctic Circle, we were able to set sail to camp on Vagøya, the nearest of a group of islands to the north-west.

There was a good breeze and bright sunshine, so we enjoyed a pleasant 5Nm. beat to a suitably sheltered bay on the second of the islands we approached. Landing at nearly 20.00, close to low water, we anchored the boat bow and aft. Extra being taken at this stage not to make the first mark on the perfect finish of the boat, either inside and out.

*Wilhelm considering whether his newly painted and varnished boat will be secure. It is near to low tide, and he is concerned that the sharp stones and shells up to the high water mark could puncture the inflatable rollers.*



A grassy area slightly sheltered by a bank and well above the high water mark made a good place to pitch our tents. Normally it doesn't take long for the local mosquito population to hunt down any juicy, fair skinned English quarry. However, I had not forgotten the nuisance they were in Nova Scotia and had brought along some Canadian 'Deet extra' which seemed to do an excellent job in keeping the Norwegian variety at bay.



*Wilhelm's tent on a grassy area kept well shorn by wild sheep. The position was sheltered by a bank, from which the photo was taken. In the background is the mountain range on the mainland, with many peaks above the cloud line.*

Wilhelm cooked a light meal, on his newly bought and highly efficient multi-fuel burner, whilst I used my GPS to note our exact position, and put in Waypoints for the next day's trip to Vega. We both felt well satisfied to be starting out on our sail of the area and the feeling of freedom that being away from civilisation brings.

The next morning was fine and warm, though a little cloudy. We managed to pack the boat rather more efficiently than we had the previous evening, when setting off had been more important than worrying too much about stowage, and were away by 11.30. Hardly an early start by normal cruising standards, but we were sailing with the inclination to gain the most pleasure and enjoyment from the trip, rather than to try to sail as many miles as possible. We also had the advantage of having no particular time by which we had to arrive at our destination before darkness.

Winds were generally light and variable for our 5Nm sail to Vega. We started and finished by motor sailing, whilst enjoying a pleasant following breeze during the mid part of the day's cruise. Rounding the south-west tip of the island, we investigated the first cove, only for Wilhelm to decide that was too rocky to risk grounding at low tide.



*Wilhelm, concerned how far the tide will fall, having dropped a stern anchor and secured the bow to a rock ashore.*

*Though the strength of flood or ebb tide wasn't as great as around the UK, there was still a rise and fall of about a metre.*

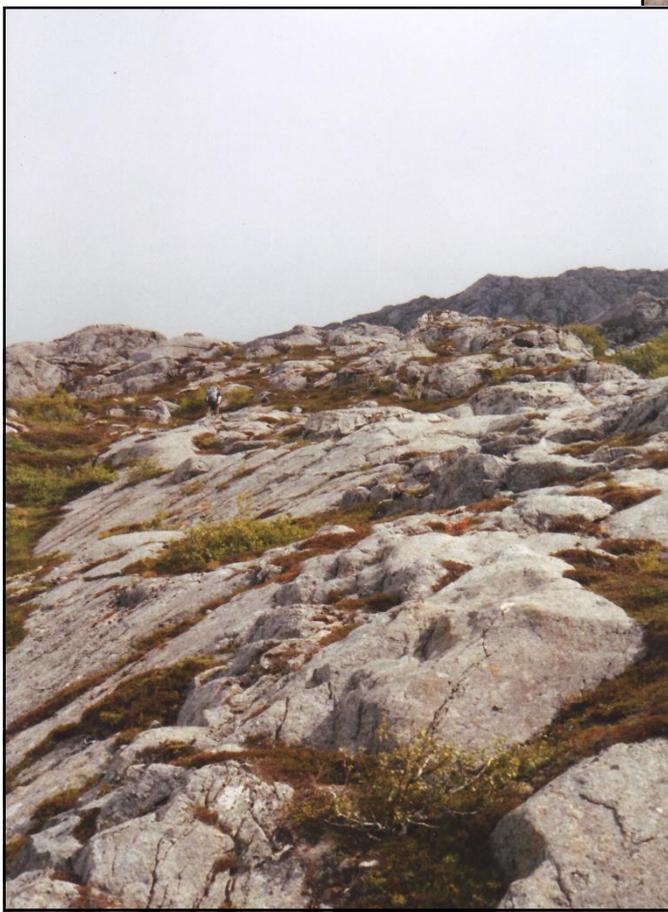
*With very little breeze in the lee of the mountain, we motored round the next headland to find what appeared to be a sandy beach with a grassy area beyond, and ideal for camping (to the right of the centre of the picture).*



A little further along the rocky shoreline at the next inlet, a welcoming sandy beach appeared, and we made our way into a much more suitable landing place.

We rolled Blunderbus up to the high water mark. Wilhelm had seen this done for the first time at the UK Cruising Conference the previous Spring, and had bought some inflatable rollers especially for this trip, though he was still a little surprised at how easily only 2 people could perform the task. The shallow gradient made this possible without the need for any winch system. Rolling the boat beyond the tide-line removed all concern about ensuring it was anchored securely, the wind changing direction, or the boat grounding at low tide.

Wilhelm's ambition for the trip was to climb as many mountains of his very beautiful and wonderfully rugged country as was possible during the trip. Next morning therefore, we set off on an intermittently marked track which Wilhelm had expected to mark the route to the high ridge of the mountain on the south shore of the island.



*Above: Blunderbus rolled up to the high water mark, with our tents pitched immediately behind. The mountain Wilhelm aimed to climb is obscured by low cloud .*

*Left: Wilhelm barely visible, adjacent to the top of a grassy patch on the far left. The mountain peak is in the distance on right.*

After a 1½ hour walk, where we had ascended to the lower foothills, the track appeared to drop back down to the coast ó a route that quite appealed to me as I remember, with my legs beginning to tire from the constant climbing. Wilhelm decided at this point that it would be better to continue striking upwards, and join the trail at a higher point. Feeling that I would hold Wilhelm back if I ventured further, I suggested he continued alone, and watched him disappear into the distance, like a mountain gazelle released from a cage.

I was happy to sit and relax for a while. Although the sky was somewhat grey and overcast, the views over the sea were still spectacular, with a cluster of small islands immediately offshore, most only a metre or two above the sea until they finally disappeared from view, and there was nothing but the vastness of the North Sea beyond.

*Looking out into the North Sea, or is it the Atlantic Ocean this far north? The photo makes the day seem more overcast than it actually was.*

*A group of the small islands only just above the surface of the water in the far distance could easily have been mistaken for a school of whales.*



Having had my fill of the beauty and peacefulness before me, I wandered back to the our camp at a leisurely pace, stopping quite frequently to take in the views at the top of any vantage point, and to pick wild Blueberries and the local Moltebaer berries. These are considered to be quite a delicacy in Norway, and have a similar appearance to raspberries, with an orangy flavour. They were certainly very refreshing, once I had acquired a taste for them.

Wilhelm returned a little after 17.00, just as I was beginning to wonder at what point I should raise the alarm for his non-return, especially as he had been confident he would return in time to sail to a more northerly point on the island. He mentioned that he had signed a book, kept in a waterproof metal box at the top of each mountain, where climbers could record their success. He had been sorry that I had been unable to add my name, but from his description of the climb, I knew that I had made the right decision to stop where I did.

I had already packed most of the gear ready for our start, so we were able to get away by 18.30. We beat our way past the nearby island of Sola, with its tall crumbling peak, which certainly looked as though it would erode away into the sea a lot more quickly than the one on Vega. Though the light was excellent, the wind still died as the evening wore on, and we needed to re-fit the outboard to motor around the north-western point of the island and on to the fishing port of Kirkroy. Initially Wilhelm had been reluctant to have an iron topsail permanently spoiling the look of his beautiful wooden Wayfarer, but from this point onwards it stayed on the outboard bracket for the rest of the trip. However, with the slightest of breezes picking up as we entered the sheltered harbour, Wilhelm made an excellent tactical move in switching the engine off and lifting it out of the water. The local fishermen were more than impressed by us sailing into the harbour on a mere zephyr of wind.

It seemed strange to hear people still working, banging away with a hammer at gone 22.00 in the evening, for though it was still light enough to work, one would have thought that youngsters would still need to be in bed and asleep. Seeking help as to where we might camp for the night, we were directed on to the settlement of Nes, which was at the other end of the inlet, open at both ends, but protected along its length by an island. The wind had dropped to virtually nothing, but it was just sufficient for us to glide downwind on the still waters to a fishing boat jetty with a floating pontoon, which Wilhelm tied up to.

*The stillness of the harbour at Nes. The Wayfarer is tied up to a jetty just beyond the row of fishing sheds on the left.*

*Nes was the largest of the naturally sheltered harbours we visited, and the whole area was well used, mostly with fishing vessels.*



We were welcomed with a warmth that I have experienced many times on sailing into a small harbour, where seafaring folk appreciate the seamanship of small open boat sailing, and we were told it was no problem to pitch our tents on a nearby grassy area. It was midnight by the time Wilhelm had prepared the meal, not helped by his expensive multi-fuel burner malfunctioning, and resorting to using his Trangia, which he had fortunately brought along as a back-up. We finally got into our sleeping bags for the night after 00.30, with the sun only just beginning to start its dip below the horizon.



*Wilhelm trying to get his newly bought stove working in order to cook an evening meal.*

*This photo taken around 23.30, with still plenty of natural light to work by.*

*The Wayfarer tied up to jetty on far side of the water. Wilhelm's red tent just visible against a shed on far left of picture. Above the moored fishing boat are the crumbling peaks of the mountain on the small island of Söla.*



We made a late start to the next day's trip, not setting out until past 15.00. A leisurely stroll had been made around the immediate area during the morning, which included a visit to the local shop to replenish our food stocks. Winds were very light when we set off, but Wilhelm, determined to maintain his sailing reputation with the local fishermen, patiently tacked his way out of the harbour entrance. We needed to resort to using the motor whilst weaving our way through the islands beyond, as they tended to blank what little wind there was.

Once into more open water, we had an easy sail to Hysvær, a group of over 50 small islands, a few of which are permanently inhabited. Wilhelm spotted a floating pontoon as we approached one of two islands with obvious signs of habitation, and asked for the fenders to be put out on the port side of his unusual (for me anyway) bigger boat technique always came to the fore whenever we approached any jetty. Every dinghy sailor I know always sails straight up to any landing place, and only sorts out the fenders and rope to tie up once berthed. One has to admit that Wilhelm's approach was the more seamanlike though.



*Unloading the boat on Hysvær. All the gear which has been unpacked from the front locker has been placed in a line along the edge of the jetty, with the hatch lid at the front, resting on the first item. Wilhelm was quite amazed at how much I could pack in this space!*

It was entirely a coincidence that we happened to land on a pontoon belonging to Øystestein Ludvigen who had been the subject of a Norwegian TV series entitled 'A year in the life of' which showed the variety of work he did to make a living on the island. These included fishing, keeping wild sheep, and collecting Eider duck down. Wilhelm had already explained to me how Øystestein had been very enterprising, using his ingenuity and many reclaimed materials to build a restaurant and a small heated open-air bathing pool.

Walking up over a brow, and following a short grassy path, we came to his house facing the other side of the island. Øystestein was on the roof with a high-pressure hose, cleaning lichen off the roof so that the rainwater collected could be used for drinking purposes.

*Wilhelm talking to Snoøfridd on the decking outside the newly built restaurant. Much of the structure of the platform was made up from pieces of timber washed up on the shores of the islands, some of the supporting sections being quite massive.*



Both Øystestein and his wife Snoøfridd, though seemingly always busy, were happy to entertain Wilhelm and I with their experience of living on the island. Whilst I was unable to understand anything being said, I could immediately recognise the energy of a person who was obviously so at home in his environment. I looked around the very impressive restaurant he had built to cater for the various visitors that now came to the island, though as there was no regular ferry, it was difficult to see how regular visitors would arrive in any quantity. Not that catering for any group was ever going to be easy, with no running fresh water or mains electricity. But Øystestein just seemed to look on any such difficulties as mere challenges to be overcome by some means or another.

Øystestein and Snoøfridd invited us to share a simple meal with them later that evening, after which they promised to take us out in their 6m aluminium motor boat to show us the natural beauty of the area. Øystestein didn't finally stop work until nearly 22.00, after which we all retreated to the restaurant for a drink. The restaurant had apparently been open for the past 3 months, and it was true that the eating area was finished and very tastefully fitted out in a sea fishing theme, with nets draped from the wooden rafters. However, with no running water in the washrooms, and with the kitchen still being fitted out, it was just as well they didn't have to satisfy any of the normal catering regulations to be operating, not that any visitors would particularly concern themselves with such things. The hospitality and the excellent home cooking on offer could not be surpassed.

Both Øystestein and Wilhelm chatted for some time, and it was nearly midnight when we set off on the promised boat tour around the nearby islands. I was soon lost in the maze of channels between the islands, many of which were quite narrow and/or shallow. There was still considerable bird life to be seen even at this late hour, the highlight being 2 sea eagles soaring away to another island as we approached. Øystestein, still in working mode, stopped on a couple of the islands to check traps.

It was 01.00 before I finally climbed into bed that night, grateful that Snoøfridd had offered me a dormitory bunk to sleep in ó which proved rather more comfort than my camp bed on the boat! I slept well, and only woke when I heard what sounded like a heavy downpour outside. It was Øystestein, up on the roof again with his high pressure hose. How long he had been up I had no idea, but I could certainly have slept for another hour or more.

Snoøfridd had been out collecting Eider duck down, which is the softest, smoothest, lightest and most beautifully textured material I have ever experienced. She mentioned that it needed to be cleaned before it could be used, and I was surprised how long it took to remove every small bit of debris to turn it into pure down. Once I had achieved this in only a small sample of down, Snoøfridd kindly offered to let me keep it, a special souvenir that I was delighted with. I was told it took the down from 80 nests to fill a typical eiderdown, and with all the work involved, I could see why a real eiderdown cost as much as £1000. This very considerable amount did however add extra value to the small amount I had been given.

*Øystestein's heated open air swimming pool - suffering from a lack of rain for the past few months, and about 600mm lower than it should have been. With no mains water on the island, it made for a useful opportunity to bathe in fresh water.*



I wandered over to the outdoor bathing pool Øystestein had created from a stream going through a natural depression in the ground. He had dug the mud out of the bottom of the depression, and then built a wall to dam the flow of water. An old boiler he had found washed up on a nearby shoreline had been built into the wall so that access could be gained inside to light a fire. Unfortunately there had been little rain during the previous months, and the water level was so low that the boiler was above the water line, but Øystestein confirmed that when the pool was full, the boiler warmed the water very effectively. It might not have been most people's concept of a heated outdoor bathing pool ó more of a scapheap challenge version. But one certainly had to admire the enterprise and ingenuity of the project.

We packed the boat and set off from the island before midday. Our next destination was Skjærvær (pronounced Shardvard!), the last group of islands beyond the coast of the next land to the west being Iceland. We first visited a well-known bird colony on the most remote of the islands, which, according to our guidebook of the area, should not be approached too close for fear of disturbing the nesting birds. There seemed little risk of this however, since the noise, and particularly the stench was enough to keep anyone at least 200m away! We were pleased after taking an obligatory photo to be able to turn and sail elsewhere.

*This was the only islands in the area where these Cormorant type sea birds nested. It was completely exposed to the open sea beyond, making it vulnerable to extreme gales and big seas which had, in the past, broken over the narrow outcrop of rock, and washed away all the nests.*



Stopping for lunch after retreating to a fresh air distance from the bird colony, we tried some fishing, which involved pulling a silver coloured weight up and down, the movement attracting the fish apparently. Obviously I didn't have the right technique, as I didn't get a single bite! We then sailed on to the largest island of the group, where there had once been a thriving fishing community, but the island was now deserted. Rocks had been quarried immediately adjacent to two extremely well built harbour walls, which enclosed a large area of water, so the fishing must have been very prosperous at one time. Rounding the harbour wall, we headed for a substantially built wooden jetty.



*Blunderbus tied off the landing stage, with a line from the stern to a mooring buoy. There were many more solidly built houses to the left of the picture. It seemed amazing that the place was entirely deserted.*

Wilhelm tied the boat off the main landing stage, and we walked along the nearby wooden building to the only door that was unlocked. This was intentionally left open for visitors, and we quickly made ourselves at home, signing the visitor's book to record our presence. I could see that I was far from being the first UK visitor after leafing back through the pages. Before cooking a meal, we set off to explore the island, which was probably less than ½ mile long by ¼ mile wide. At the southern end there was a natural inlet that could only be entered at high tide by a shallow draft boat – a perfect shelter for a Wayfarer in fact. The bird life on the island made it a real twitcher's paradise and I wished I had a book of all the various birds of the area with me. After returning to our visitors cabin, we cleaned an area of floor to lay out the various detailed charts Wilhelm had bought specially for the trip, so that we could plan in more detail the next part of our cruise.

*Wilhelm preparing the meal in the 'visitors cabin'. Whilst it looks as though the ladder provides access to a bunk area above, in practice it was barely possible to squeeze into the space available, and we ended up sleeping on the floor.*



It seemed very strange that there was no look of dilapidation about the place, in fact everything appeared very substantially built, and yet there was nobody to be seen on the island. Some of the houses appeared to be holiday homes, with flagpoles outside. It is always customary in Norway to raise the Norwegian flag, often a long thin pennant, whenever a holiday home is in residence, but there were no flags flying here, even though it was the middle of July.

After enjoying a good evening meal, we cleared the floor to spread out the 7 detailed charts Wilhelm had of the area so that we could determine what might be the best possible route for the rest of our trip. Wilhelm's desired aim was to reach the outer island group of Træna, before returning to Brønnøysund via Alsten, one of the larger inner coastal islands which had a mountain range called 'the seven sisters' he particularly wanted to climb. The floor then provided us with a hard, but useful place on which to sleep.

We were woken around 00.30 by the sound of a fishing boat entering the harbour. It proved to be the owner of the island, whom we met the next morning. Wilhelm was keen to learn about the island's history, and whilst they chatted, I packed the boat ready to get away. It proved to be one of our more early starts, as we were off before 11.00. We planned to sail due north to the much larger island of Lovund, with its mini version of the Gibraltar rock facing out toward the sea.

The next day's sail started out in beautiful sunshine with a good following wind. It was the first time we had experienced such ideal sailing conditions, and we expected to reach Lovund without difficulty. By the early afternoon however, the wind had backed to a more northerly direction, and later dropped to only a light breeze, so the motor was used once more to make our way to the next group of islands called Gaasvær.

*Having stopped for a break, Wilhelm sailed off on his own so that I could take a picture of Blunderbus under sail. It was the only such picture we were to get on the whole of the cruise.*



This proved to have only a slightly greater population than Skjærvær, with at least 2 of the houses occupied. It was also once an obviously more active community, with both a church (still in use, though locked) and a school (now closed down). Any thoughts of making further progress toward Lovund were dispelled by the lack of wind, and a local fisherman, who gave us 2 fresh cod to cook for our evening meal.



*We moored Blunderbus between two of the landing stages after we had unloaded our gear, to allow for the rise and fall of tide.*

*The landing stage from which the photo was taken had fallen into considerable disrepair, and great care was needed to get this shot!*

We set up our tents behind the fishing sheds attached to the jetty, and walked around the island, inspecting the remains of what was once a considerable and thriving fishing industry, with rail tracks between two production warehouses. We slept well that night after eating more than our fill of the tastiest locally caught fresh cod I have experienced.

It was very convenient that unlike sailing in the UK, the time of high water or the direction of the tidal flow was of little concern, and our only consideration when setting off was the weather. With a strong following wind the next day, we set sail under reefed main, and Blunderbus surged along in the short swell, creaking rhythmically in time honoured wooden fashion. Blunderbus seemed most happy to be continuing its fine cruising traditions.

The last group of islands due north before Lovund was Aasvær. It was a similar maze of islands to many of the other groups, and by exploring the various channels between the islands, we came upon a small but superbly sheltered harbour, with a few fishing boats and other small craft either on moorings, or tied to jetties. Spotting a floating pontoon ahead, it seemed an ideal time to stop for a lunch break, and look around the island. I did wonder whether someone from the nearby house would come over and ask us to move, but no-one did.

*Blunderbus can be seen apparently next to a landing stage off the house, but is in fact moored to a pontoon beyond. The photo is of the narrow and shallower end of the small and well used natural harbour.*



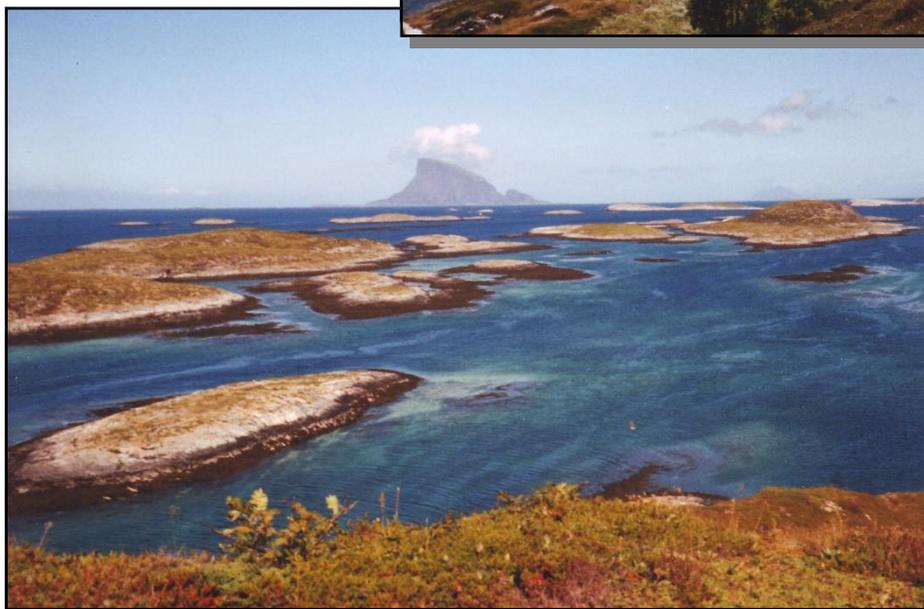
Hidden from view on the other side of the island was yet another, deeper channel, with a Hydrographic survey ship moored to a once busy commercial jetty.



*The Norwegian hydrographic survey ship anchored on Aasvær, looking out to the south-west and the deep water exit to the open sea.*  
*There was no sign of activity on board the ship, so not much surveying seemed to be in progress!*

Whilst Wilhelm chatted to a local person to discover more about the place, I set off to the top of a small hill to gain a better view of the immediate surroundings. Looking down from a height, one could get a broader perspective of the many islands and channels of Aasvær.

*Looking out to the south-east from a hilltop on Aasvær. The many channels can be seen much more clearly from above than when on the water, where foreground and background merge to conceal many of the entrances. Blunderbus can (just) be seen near the centre of the picture.*



*Looking north toward Lovund, with its clear 'Gibraltar Rock' shape. The cloud formations which the peak caused were even more pronounced as we sailed past on our return, when the island produced a stream of clouds like a steam engine.*

After a couple of hours break and exploration of this particular island, we decided to continue on to the much larger island of Lovund. Wilhelm had not climbed any mountains since Vega, and was therefore keen to move on to this next opportunity. Lovund had been visible on the horizon for the last few days, but was now only some 5 miles to the north, and easily reached for our next stop.

Whilst the wind had started out very fresh in the morning, it dropped significantly whilst we were on Aasvær, and we took the reef out of the main before setting off. Wilhelm spent next part of the trip trying to get me to pronounce Lovundø which sometimes seemed have an -aø added on the end, and I eventually managed to -singø this with the right inflection to (nearly) pronounce it correctly!

The wind continued to drop during the afternoon and we had to use the motor as we approached the lee of the 620m wedge shaped mountain. We noticed an enticing sandy beach in a bay as we cruised up the west side of the island. Initially we thought it would be worth pulling up on the beach if only to take a photo of the Wayfarer against the backdrop of the mountain. However we soon appreciated that it would make an ideal camping spot for the night, with a large flat grassy area kept short by wild sheep.

Also camping near the shore were a couple on a canoe tour of the area, and another couple who were sailing along the coast in a traditional Norwegian sailing boat, which they had left at a harbour on the mainland. They had used the ferry to get over to the island to spend a few days exploring it on foot with their dog. They were certainly intrigued by what they felt was a very ambitious trip in our very small boat.



*It wasn't until the photos were developed that I found that the two separate prints could be put together to make a more panoramic view. No doubt this could be done much more professionally by computer imagery.*

*Wilhelm had to walk round the other side of the mountain for his ascent. The Puffin colony is on the face of the mountain just to the left of the photo.*



After setting up our tents, we walked round the northern headland and into the main town on the island, stopping at a hotel for Wilhelm to enquire the route to climb to the top of the mountain. This seemed quite a popular pastime, since the girl at the bar quickly produced a leaflet with that and other trails marked on it. I decided on something rather less energetic, and ordered a glass of beer. This cost me 50 Nkr ó about £4. Fortunately I had been aware that drinks were expensive in Norway, so it didn't take me quite so long to recover from the shock as it might have done! It had been a very warm afternoon/evening, so the cool glass of beer was greatly savoured. Using the washroom to clean my hands and face in fresh water for the first time in 3 to 4 days also made me feel I was getting better value for the price of the beer.

I wandered around the small town before heading back to our base, and was in time to watch the island's famous Puffin colony return from their day's feeding out at sea. Hundreds left the mountain each morning and their return was a truly amazing sight of soaring into their nesting site in small black, cloud like, formations.

Wilhelm returned around 3 o'clock in the morning, having found he had taken a dead end route up the mountain which could not be traversed, and had to return down quite a long way before finding the correct route to the top. He mentioned that this time he had added my name in the book at the top of with greetings in my absence!

Next morning the wind was blowing force 5 from the north. No problem for our proposed trip out west to Træna, but the canoeists we had befriended, Ole and Torunn, were apprehensive about setting out. We mentioned that we would keep an eye on them if they decided to make the trip, something we later thought perhaps was not such a good idea, since it certainly influenced their decision to go. Acting as an escort slowed us down considerably for the first half of the trip, but eventually they allowed us to give them a tow, which enabled us to reach Træna in reasonable time.

*Ole and Torunn in their canvas canoe on their way to Træna. It was Torunn's first canoe trip and she always seemed to have a happy smile on her face. I'm not too sure that either of them were fully aware of the potential dangers of canoeing in such cold, exposed seas.*

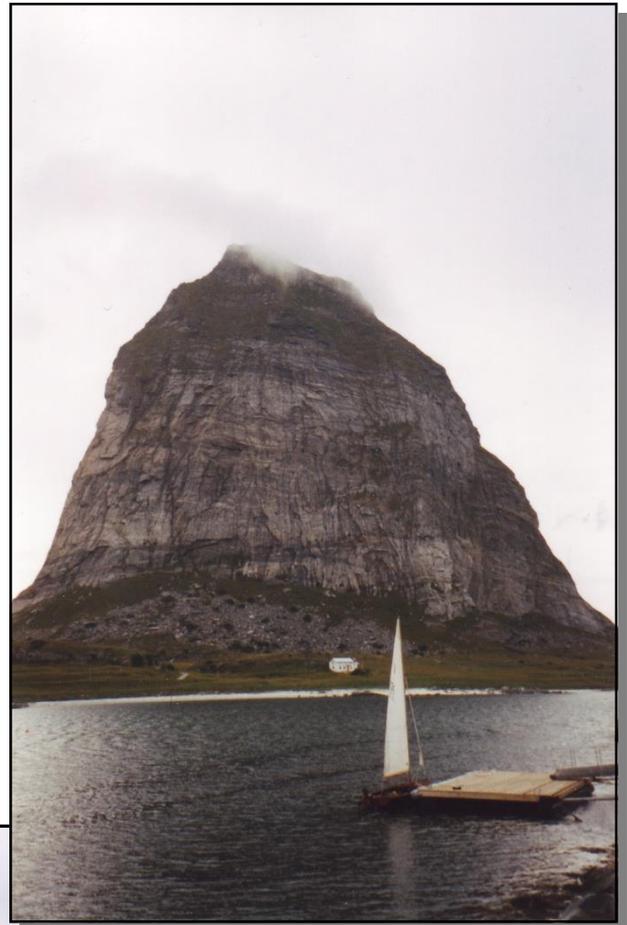


*The three peaks of Træna. The nearest, lower one being rather spoilt by the NATO radar station built into the top. The natural cave of Kirkhellaren is below the middle peak, and the far side of the furthest peak wasn't much less steep than this facing east side.*

Wilhelm's chart showed a sheltered bay on the most westward of the two main islands, with its 3 prominent mountain peaks. We headed for this spot after dropping off our intrepid canoeists on reaching the first island - who had desperately needed a comfort stop! We tied up against a pontoon for Wilhelm to enquire where we might camp for the night, and before Wilhelm's return, Ole and Torunn paddled in round the harbour wall to join us again, having found somewhere convenient for their immediate needs!

A sandy beach to the north of the bay, next to the local cemetery was recommended as the most ideal place to set up our tents. Landing was no problem, but finding a flatish area to pitch our tents proved rather more difficult. Ole and Torunn managed to resolve this rather better than Wilhelm and I, for we were both to wake several times during the following night to find we had rolled off our sleeping mats.

We spent the evening exploring the more exposed west side of the island. I took the easier route back between the single taller mountain, and the adjacent range with its twin peaks, whilst Wilhelm continued along the coast and then over most southerly peak with the NATO radar station. After making plans to explore more of the island the next day, we retreated to our tents for a less than comfortable night.



*Above:  
Blunderbus moored to a pontoon whilst Wilhelm enquired about camping.*

*Left:  
The view from near the Radar Station at the top of the first mountain. We were camped by the sandy beach to the far left of the sheltered bay in the photo.*

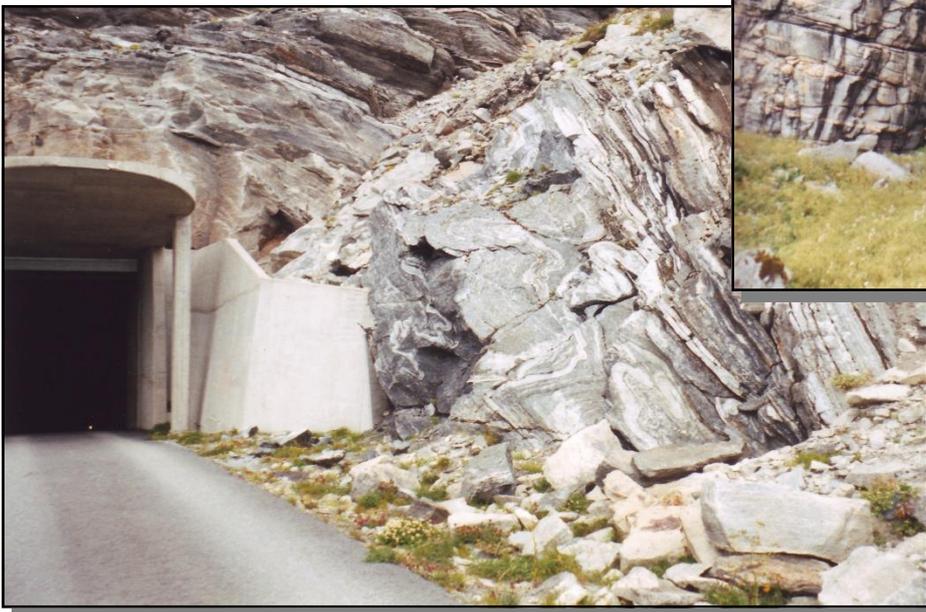
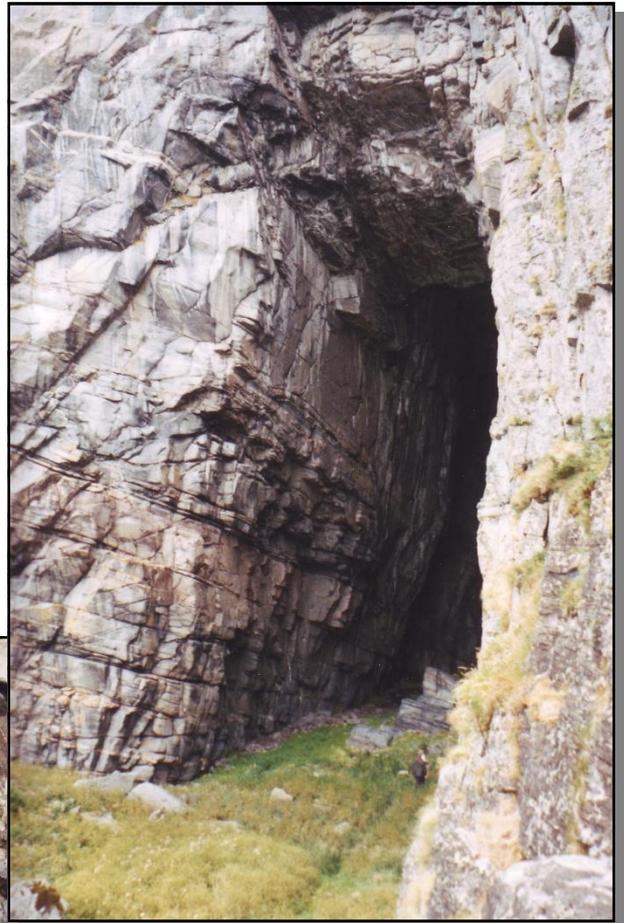
The next morning dawned bright but the people running the local community centre had given us a forecast of rain later in the morning. Wilhelm, Ole and Torunn set out to climb the highest peak, whilst I decided on something less ambitious by visiting a large cave we had seen, and climbing the lowest of the three mountains.

I set out along the road through the community of houses around the harbour, before following a well worn path to the natural cave known as Kirkhellaren ó the natural cathedral. And pretty impressive it was too. A geological fault line in the rocks had created horizontal rock formations on either side, with a vertical formation between. The collapse of the lower section had led to a cave being formed that was 32m high, 20m wide and 45m deep. It was an ancient site, with remains dating back 9000 years.

Walking back along the grassy shoreline, I came to a footpath with steps and a rope handrail leading to the top of the lowest peak. I still found it hard work to reach the top, and it was only Wilhelm's desire for me to see the view from the top of a mountain in the area that gave me the resolve to keep going. The view however was certainly spectacular, and well worth all the

*Right:*

*The natural cave of Kirkhellaren, the size of which can be judged by the people on the right, near the wall of the entrance.*



*Left:*

*The entrance to the tunnel made through the central mountain, revealing some very intricate rock formations.*

A tunnel had been carved through the adjacent mountain for the construction of the radar station. I decided to take this easier route down, as the lower entrance on the other side was only a short distance from our camp. With no torch, there was complete blackness after the first 100m, and it needed a steeled determination to continue walking blind, with hands outstretched to touch the walls before I stumbled into them. It was just about the most scary thing I have ever done. I could literally feel my hair standing on end! The supposedly 700m length of the tunnel seemed more like 7 miles, and it was with great relief when a speck of light finally appeared in view.

I met up with the others on my return to our camp. They had been forced to give up their attempt to climb to the top of the highest peak as it was too difficult without specialist climbing equipment. The rain started soon after my return and continued heavily for the rest of the day, so we decided to stay put rather than move on. The local Community Centre however provided us with some of the best hospitality possible in the not so pleasant conditions. We were invited to dry any of our wet gear, enjoy the luxury of another shower, and even offered an excellent meal when they had over-estimated the food needed for a group of other guests.

The next morning was still wet and also very windy, but with brightening conditions we decided it was time to start our return to Brønnøysund. The weather certainly wasn't suitable for Ole and Torunn to set out though, and we learned later that they had caught the ferry back to the mainland. We set off under reefed main, and once clear of the protection of the islands, also changed down to a small jib. We sailed reasonably comfortably close hauled for the next 7 hours clear the southern point on Lovund, and on towards the large offshore island of Dønna. It proved to be a long, wet sail, with a regular amount of spray coming over the gunwale and we were pleased to reach shelter behind the island of Vandoed, where we stopped for an hour's break and a change of clothes.

*Taking a break in the lee of the island of Vandoed. The much larger island of Dønna is in the background, with the mountains of the mainland covered by cloud beyond. It had been a relief to be able to get ashore to eat, change and relax after a hard 7 hour sail.*



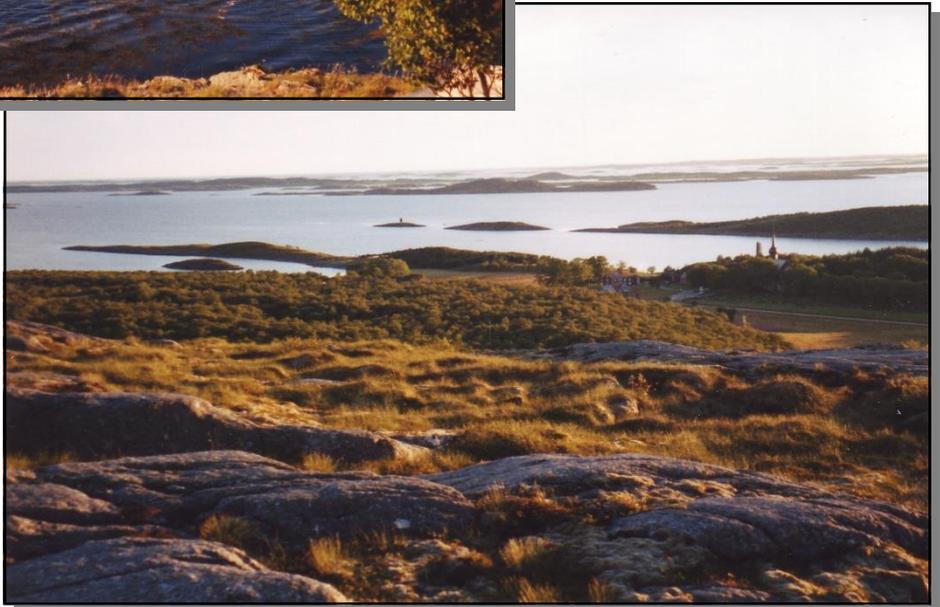
The wind had dropped significantly whilst on Vandoed, but we decided to make further progress towards Brønnøysund before stopping for the night. After setting off around 21.30, we soon needed to use the motor to make reasonable progress. Weaving through the channels between the islands on the southern tip of Dønna would have proved an interesting challenge had Wilhelm not previously sailed the area to know the route. We passed under a number of bridges linking these islands to Dønna, and it was obvious from the large houses and expensive motor boats, that this was quite an exclusive place for people to live. It was getting quite late by now, and we were both tired from the day's sail, but there didn't look to be anywhere particularly convenient to land where people wouldn't mind us setting up our tents. We eventually decided to continue on to Alstadhaug on the southern tip of Alsten, but with no wind, it proved to be a long 3-hour motor before reaching our destination.

We finally tied the boat up to the wooden jetty at 02.30, just as the sun was beginning to rise again. The tents were quickly put up and we readily collapsed into our sleeping bags. Alstadhaug is well known in Norway for its church and the personality and poetry of a local pastor, Peter Dass, who had lived in the area in the 1680s. He had been extremely popular with the local community and fondly remembered. The church and adjacent museum were a well-visited tourist attraction. Wilhelm was, as always, interested in local history, but his main ambition was to climb one or more of the nearby mountain ridges known as the Seven Sisters. He offered me whichever of the sisters I preferred. Unfortunately for Wilhelm, I felt they all looked rather too tall for me!



*The graceful steeple of the old and elegant church of Alstadhaug, with a pillar nearby to commemorate the life of Peter Dass.  
The first of the seven sisters mountain range is in the background.*

*The mass of islands offshore seen from a low hill above the church, the spire of which can be seen to the right of the picture. The adjacent graveyard contained some very elaborate headstones.*



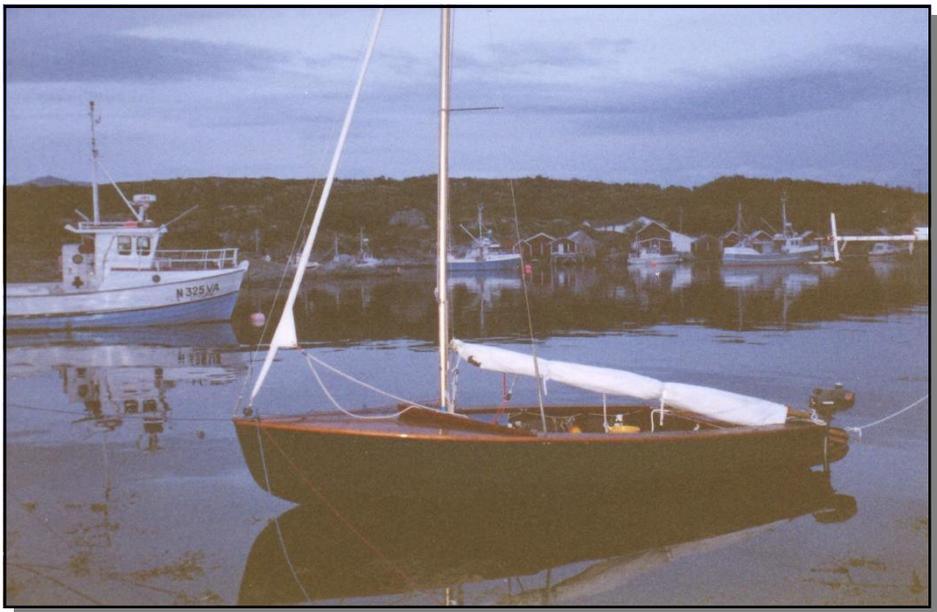
The weather would have been perfect the next day to cover the distance we had motored the previous evening and night. There was glorious sunshine and a pleasant northerly breeze. If only we had known the weather was going to be so much better than the forecast! It was almost too hot to make hiking enjoyable, nevertheless Wilhelm accomplished his aim by climbing the first two of the seven peaks. In the meantime, I had been given a personal guided tour of the local church, and later climbed the lower foothills beyond the church to look out on the many islands of Skaalvær, which we planned to visit for the final part of our cruise.

The following day was bright, with a pleasant north-easterly breeze, but the forecast gave deteriorating weather conditions, with gales predicted in a few days time. Wilhelm decided to make the most of the day's good weather by sailing through the maze of islands immediately offshore, before stopping for the night somewhere within easy reach of Brønnøysund, just in case the weather worsened earlier than expected.

After starting out around mid-day, we stopped shortly after 16.00 for a break on one of the larger islands. It had a local shop within reasonable walking distance, and as we were running out of some food items, including cans of beer, Wilhelm decided it would be worth the trek. Unfortunately Wilhelm arrived too late to be served alcohol, and even his query "Are you sure it is after 16.00?" (it was at least 16.45), only got the shopkeeper to hesitate for a moment before deciding that it was indeed past the time he could sell cans of beer. Perhaps a local person might have been given more preferential treatment!

We weaved our way through the islands, and it was here that we hit our first rock in the middle of a relatively open stretch of water, just to remind us that not all the rocky outcrops were above the surface, and visible. Fortunately it was only the centre plate that made contact. By early evening we were immediately north of Vega, and though our general position was easy to determine from the island's prominent mountain, exactly which particular islands we were sailing past would have been impossible to ascertain without the GPS. Rounding the north-east point of Vega, we made for the island of Ylvingen (Wilhelm eventually had to give up trying to get me to pronounce this correctly!) and stopped for the night in a sheltered fishing harbour, tying the boat up between two wooden fishing jetties.

*The jetties to which Blunderbus is tied had no access along the side of the sheds to the shore. This was very useful for security, but made it quite difficult for us to moor the boat in deeper water, whilst still being able to gain access to it.*



It was evident the following morning that the weather was on the change as there was a blustery southerly breeze and intermittent showers. We were visited fairly early by one of the fishermen living in the small town opposite, as we were obviously camping on his property, but he proved to be very friendly and helpful when Wilhelm chatted to him about our cruise. We made a short visit to the harbour area of the town before setting off around mid-morning for the last day of our memorable cruise, which entailed a relatively easy 10 Nm beat back to the marina and launch site.

After rounding the southern point of Ylvingen, we sailed close hauled towards the mainland, crossing the main deep-water route along the Norwegian coast. A luxury liner, one of many that cruise the coastline and fjords, passed fairly close by. We were dressed up in our full sailing gear and one could imagine the cruise passengers looking out at us from the comfort of their temperature controlled lounges, perhaps even taking pity on us -poor wretches-

*The deep water route taken by all the cruise ships are clearly marked on the chart, which mostly follows the coastline, and is well inside most of the route for our own cruise.*



However, there was no desire to change places with them - well perhaps the shower and toilet facilities might have been a slight temptation! But even these comforts weren't worth the handicap of only able to look out at the magnificent scenery from a distance, and often behind the barrier of a glass screen. Stopping at one of the main ports for some -retail therapy- and possibly meeting a few -local people- dressed up for their arrival was a whole world away from our experience of seeing the magnificent scenery from a much closer viewpoint, and meeting real local people with their very generous hospitality.

Our Norwegian cruise had been given us a chance to encounter at first hand the true environment of the area. We had been able to stop at any point we wished, and get much closer to the wonder and majesty of the landscape. The trip would perhaps have been even more magical had we been able to continue on our northerly course from Træna. This would have enabled us to cross the Arctic Circle, explore one or more of the fjords in greater depth, and hike to the Svartisen glacier, which comes within a few miles of the shoreline at one point. Unfortunately this was not a practical option, but is always something one can look forward to experiencing another year. In fact, one could spend years cruising the Norwegian coastline and waterways, without ever losing the desire to go back for more.

Ralph Roberts W9885 (but sailing W1309 Blunderbus, for this trip)