



LYN'S WYM

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MAP OF NORWAY

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FROM DONAVENTURE IN A



TO GATWICK IN AN



TO BERGEN IN A



ABOARD "MS MIDNATSOL"



TO KIRKENES



AND BACK!



Foreword.

Lyn's Wym.

On occasions Lyn comes out with a whim. It might be for a glass of Remy Martin, or for a ride on the Wheel in London, or just for a banana. One dark and gloomy day in November she came up with an idea for a cruise in the Norwegian Fjords. Lyn is not a demanding person of the sort who will stamp its foot or sulk for days, perhaps it is just her knack of crediting the initial inspiration for her whim to me, which unfailingly makes me fall in with her wishes. On this particular occasion the fact that she knew where Norway was took me aback. Her grasp of geography is of the brand "Los Angeles, is it on the left or right going up America?".

To me Norway meant tinned sardines, rapine Vikings with flaxen hair, and a craggy, almost totally mountainous country, bordering the cold and inhospitable North Atlantic Ocean. I recalled that Norway was where Hitler had brought the "phoney" phase of World War II to an end by his brutal invasion and subjugation of the country. Memories came into my mind of avidly each day studying the newspaper accounts and maps of Hitler's progress and of Britain's tragic attempts to assist Norway in her doomed resistance. Norwegian place-names came back to me, such as Hammerfest, Tromsø, Lofoten and particularly Narvik where many precious British warships and lives had been lost before our under-equipped forces had pulled out.

As might be deduced, therefore, my enthusiasm for Lyn's suggestion did not exactly bubble over. But like all experienced husbands I recognised that a wife's expressed whim is virtually an edict. Dutifully I started to search the internet for leads on Norwegian cruises. I hoped and expected that reflections about rough seas and cold climates would cool her interest. After all she was at most a reluctant flier so I needn't really worry.

The internet is a truly magical medium for just about anything, be it a search for information or a booking on the first passenger flight to the Moon. It soon turned up numerous options, from package-holidays, to Fred Olsen's sailings across the North Sea, to the offerings by "Norwegian Coastal Voyages Ltd." – the "Hurtigruten".

I will digress to explain that the word "Hurtigruten" means Express Route, or Coastal Express. Norway is a narrow strip of land over a thousand miles long, whose width from the Swedish border to the coast is in places barely twenty miles. Historically therefore, just about the only way to travel from one place to another has been by sea. The Coastal Express evolved from this circumstance by a combination of several companies based along the coast to form the "Hurtigruten". Intended initially to transport goods and passengers it became popular for pleasure voyagers as well. Today the fleet of eleven ultra-modern ships, which range from gross tonnages of 5000 to 16000, ply the route from Bergen northwards as far as Kirkenes and back. It is a daily service. The working ships combine commerce with leisure and pleasure, and in the course of their 12 day round trip from Bergen-Kirkenes-Bergen they stop at around thirty Norwegian ports, unloading and loading goods and provisions for the many otherwise semi-isolated townships, as well as passengers travelling from a to b.

Though working ships they are indeed luxury cruise ships in every sense and the crew seems devoted to making everybody's journey pleasurable and comfortable.

Norwegian Coastal Voyages offer the traveller several options and our initial thought was to plan a journey by car via the Channel Tunnel, through France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Denmark to reach Norway. Then to take a three or four day cruise, with car, to say Trondheim via the intervening fjords, then disembarking and driving homewards via Oslo and possibly Copenhagen. With the use of our "Autoroute" software we plotted out an itinerary accordingly but soon realised that the considerable amount of driving, much of it through terrain of little passing interest, would not be worth the candle. Norwegian Coastal Voyages offered a 12 day round trip voyage up to Kirkenes, passing the North Cape, the northernmost part of Europe and only about 1000 miles from the North Pole.

By this time my own interest had changes from very lukewarm to "Let's find out more" and we began to read up books about Scandinavia and to study the comprehensive information provided by Norwegian Coastal Voyages on their website. Their London Office sent us a brochure whose excellence made us both very keen.

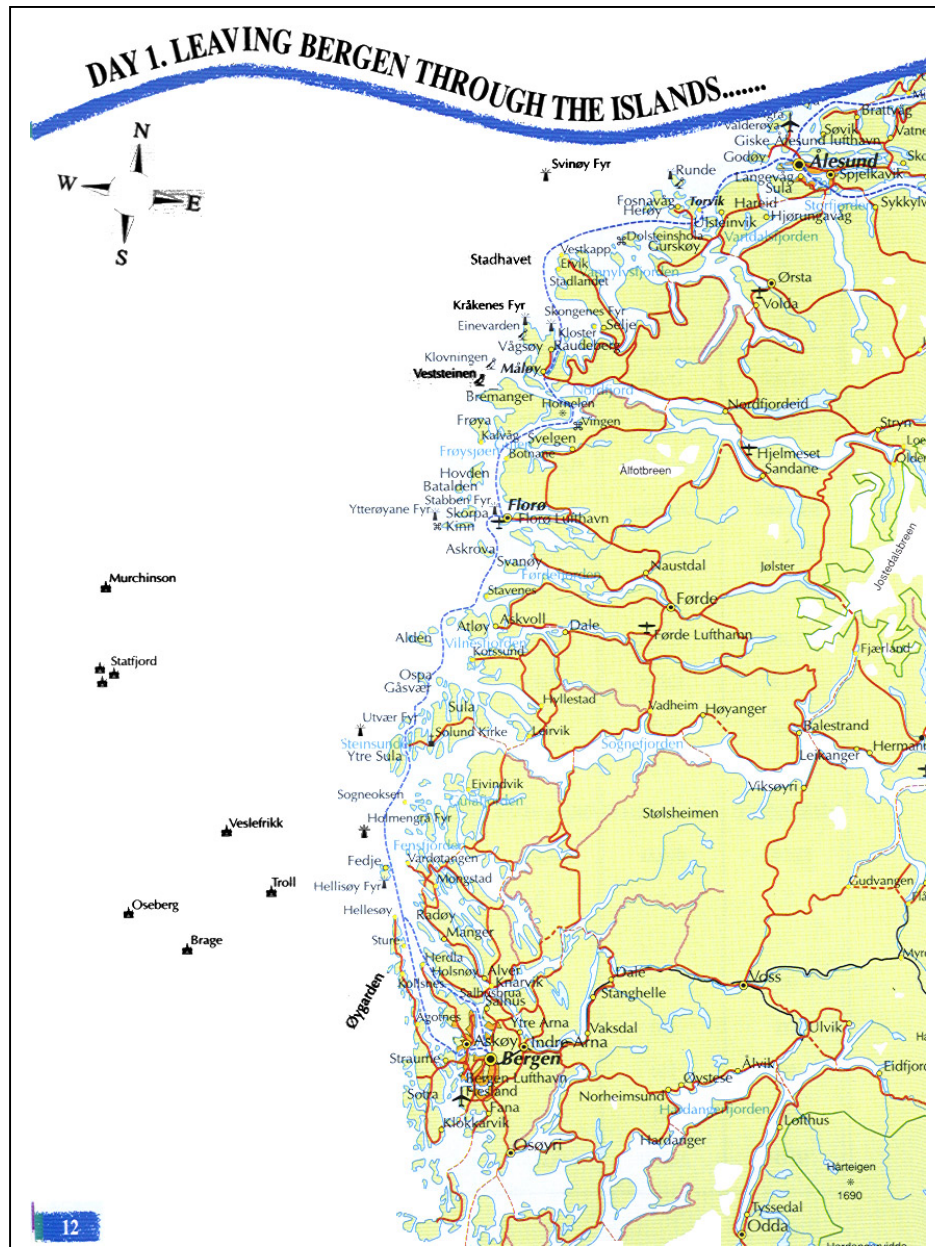
I should explain here that Lyn is not prone to travel sickness but has an inner ear defect, which makes her very sensitive to unpredictable movements out of the horizontal. The best description I can give of the effect of this malady is to relate its symptoms to a few experiences when I have drunk too much alcohol before going to bed. Even with eyes closed the room swims uncontrollably – it is a most unpleasant feeling. Despite this Lyn is not easily deterred from flying though she makes a fuss when the pilot banks sharply. Neither was Lyn deterred by references in the brochure to occasional "rough patches" during the voyage – apprehensive but not over-awed.

So we decided to give a voyage a try and duly booked up for a round trip starting May 7th, with a flight to Bergen from Gatwick on the 6th. We chose a booking on the Motor Ship "Midnatsol" (Midnight Sun), the newest ship due to be commissioned in April 2003, only one month before our planned departure. Unfortunately it has to be said that, were the ship to have been built in Britain, we should not have dreamed of risking that it would in fact have been ready to sail that month. But "Midnatsol" sailed on its maiden voyage on the due date. Liking our comforts we chose the largest cabin with a double bed (although there are two very expensive suites) near to the sharp end of the vessel. The all-in cost was high and we decided that this would have to be a trip of a lifetime – until, that is, Lyn had another whim.

Douglas Huntington, Bonaventure, June 2003.

NORWAY





Chapter One.

Day one – Bergen and Departure.

The flight by Braathens, a subsidiary of SAS, Scandinavian Airline Systems, was smooth and uneventful, arriving at Bergen in the evening where a minibus in the charge of a very courteous lady waiting for us in the arrival hall with a Norwegian Coastal Voyages placard greeted us. We were the only passengers and en route to the Radisson SAS Hotel the driver gave us a tourist's commentary on noteworthy places in Bergen as she drove. The hotel is situated on Bryggen, the wharfeside of ancient Bergen, which was once dominated by the Germanic commercial monopoly, the Hanseatic League.

We had booked a room with a double bed. Our experience with hotels had taught us when registering to enquire about the room's facilities. It turned out that the room allocated had two single beds and the receptionist seemed to find the term "double bed" rather difficult. Our explanation at first seemed to cause her a problem. I suggested that the divorce rate in Norway must be high if they didn't cater for guests requiring a double bed. She laughed and improvised by arranging two beds to be conjoined to meet our strange needs.

A modern hotel, the Radisson offered Lyn's inner ear its first Scandinavian challenge. The lift's smooth take-off passed the test and we settled for the night in a comfortable room to be ready for the next day's adventure. Whereas most modern hotel rooms have windows which will not open, depending on air conditioning for ventilation, this room had both air conditioning and windows, which we were able to open at will – a great boon. Much of the day had been spent in a stuffy airport and a crowded plane and we longed for fresh air.



The ship's departure was not due next day until 8 pm. So we were able to spend time exploring Bergen including a trip on the funicular railway up a tall hill overlooking the city, where a fabulous view could be enjoyed. Again the funicular passed the test of Lyn's inner ear. In Bergen we came across the inevitable Irish Guinness pub. Lyn spotted a shop selling reindeer skins which she noted mentally for a visit at the end of our cruise.

At about 5pm. a coach called at the Radisson Hotel to collect passengers taking the Coastal Voyage cruise. From the Radisson he called at about 5 other Bergen hotels collecting more passengers. We and our baggage were deposited alongside the very large "Midnatsol" and having marked each of our cases with the cabin numbers we

were told that these would be delivered to our cabins by the crew whilst we boarded and registered with the Purser. The job of queuing to register was our first hint of “pushing and shoving” which we were to experience throughout the cruise, mainly from large Germans of both sexes. Obviously they had not acquired the wartime British discipline of queuing in an orderly fashion.

Lyn braving the lift!

Having occupied our cabin, number 705, located on Deck 7 we were keen to explore



the ship. “Midnatsol” has 9 decks, Decks 2 and 3 being for crew accommodation and vehicles, Deck 4 being Reception, Purser’s and Administration Offices and Decks 4, 6 and 7 being for passenger cabins, (the Bridge is also on Deck 7) Deck 5 for the restaurant, cafeteria, shops and lounges, Deck 8 contains the bar and smoking and non-smoking lounges, a library/reading/games room, a “computer café” and an information room staffed by the Cruise Director. Up front on Deck 8 is also an Observation Room for passengers inquisitive to see where they are heading without having to brave the weather outside. Finally Deck 9 is an open promenade deck. All decks are accessible via two wide staircases and two lifts. The latter passed muster and Lyn had no problems with their smooth performance.

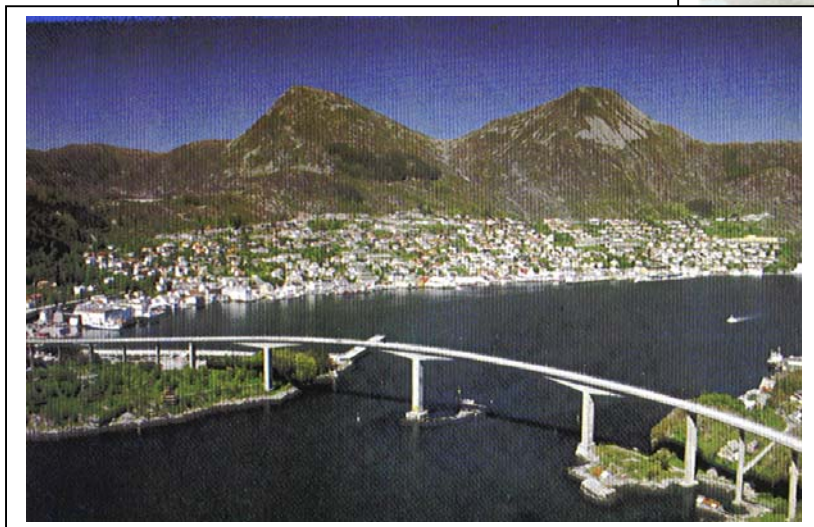
High on our priority list was exercise, as we had spent much of the previous day travelling. So we made for Deck 6, which has a walkway round its circumference wide enough for two ordinary passengers or for one German. After a couple of brisk circuits enjoying the air we paused at the stern to smoke a cigar. Another passenger approached and asked us for a cigar. Slightly taken aback we gave him one, mentally hoping that it was not a national habit to scrounge cigars from strangers. We had brought a limited supply, enough only for our own consumption. We gave him a light and chatted for a few minutes, demurring his offer to pay for the cigar when a ship’s officer accompanied by a police officer came up and took our new friend aside. He was led away off the ship and it transpired that he was a stowaway whom the police were seeking about a robbery from a Bergen shop that afternoon! The administrative staff must have been very sharp to spot him as a person who had not registered to join the ship. Our next task was to go to the restaurant on Deck 5 to reserve a table for the voyage and to choose whether to eat at first or second sitting. We chose a table for two with a good starboard-side view and to eat at the first sitting.



“Midnatsol” left Bergen at 8 pm., threading her way through the fjord in which the city lies. Lyn and I retired to the restaurant for a light supper prior to a couple more brisk circuits round the vessel before settling down for the night.

We found the cabin to be quite comfortable. A large window gave us a good view of the passing coast, though we were to find the long hours of daylight strange. These hours increased as we travelled northwards and we found it necessary to close the curtains for sleeping. The cabin was efficiently air-conditioned and our only complaint was that, when flushed, our toilet was extremely noisy. However it was very efficient and the sound proofing of the cabins was such that neighbouring “flushers” were not audible.

It was very relaxing to lie in bed and to feel the gentle, almost imperceptible roll of the ship. We slept quite soundly during our first night at sea, and were only vaguely aware that “Midnatsol” had called in at two ports overnight – at Florø at 2.15 am. and at Måløy at 4.30 am. At the latter port I got up to take a photograph of one of Norway’s largest fishing ports, where about 200,000 tonnes of fish are landed each year. We admired Måløy bridge which is 1224 metres in length, and as we were to find, typical of the many handsome bridges linking parts of Norway., When leaving port we passed a sister ship “M/S Nordlys” entering harbour on her way southwards to Bergen

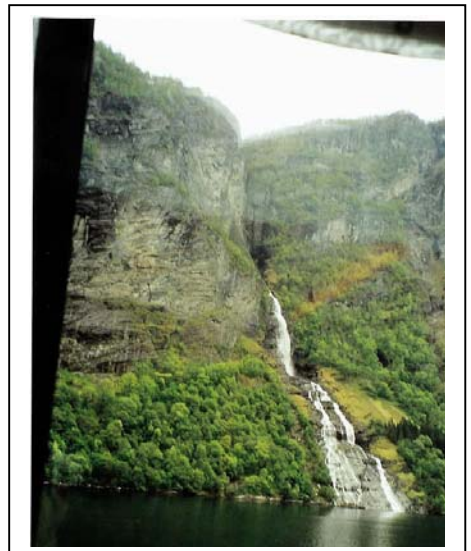


Top left: leaving Måløy
Above: m/s Nordlys
Left: Måløy Bridge.

Chapter 2. Ålesund and Geiranger Fjord.

We reached the port of Torvik at 7.30 am. after crossing an open stretch of sea which in other circumstances, could have been rougher than we had so far experienced. However it was very smooth and soon we were once again threading our way between mainland and islands on our way to Ålesund at the mouth of Storfjorden which in turn leads into Geiranger Fjord. Ålesund is a very attractive town. It was burnt to the ground in 1904, and subsequently rebuilt in the Art Nouveau style. We stopped here only briefly because we would be returning later in the day, after having visited Geiranger Fjord.

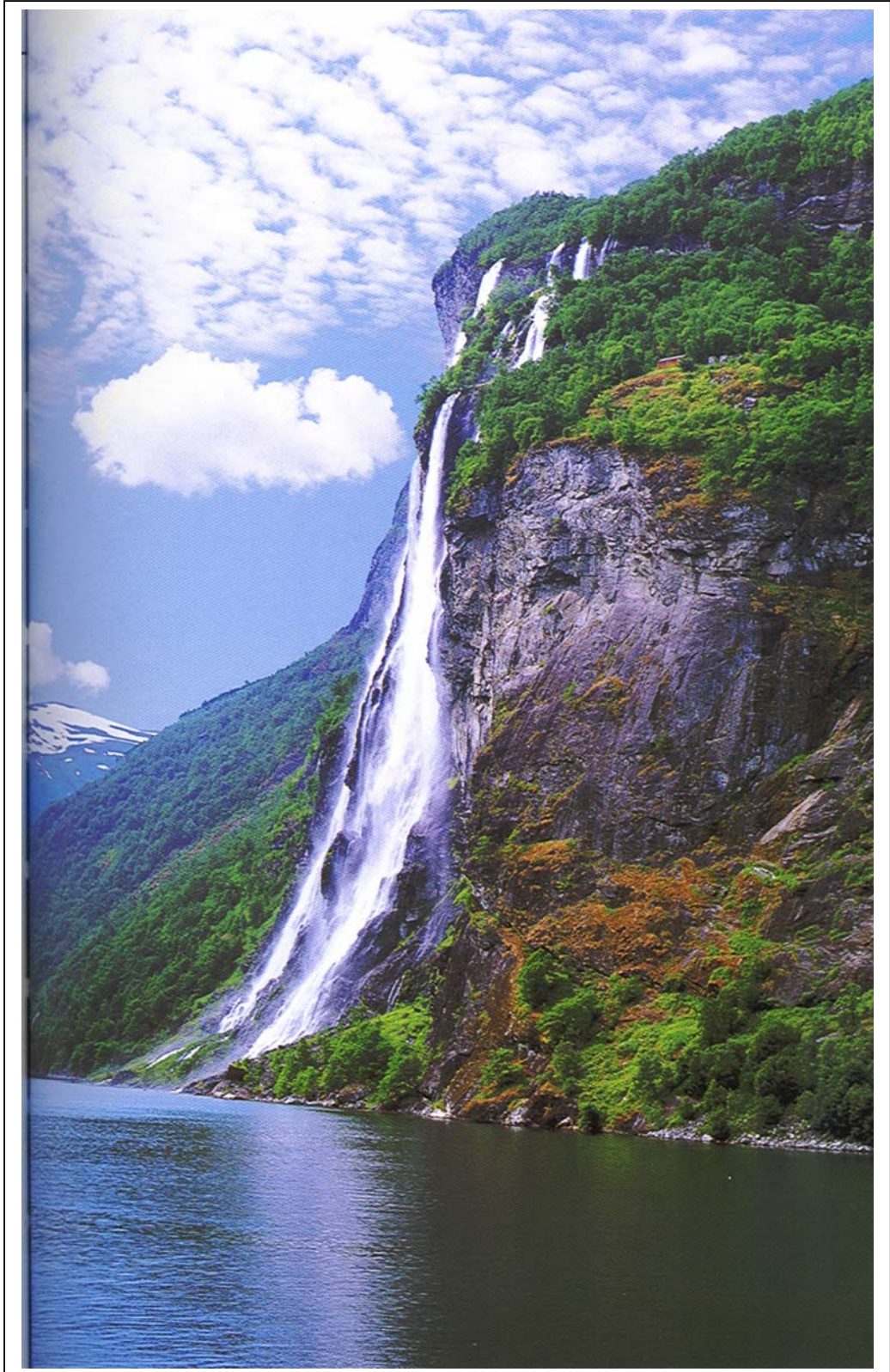
The fjord reaches 100 km (65 miles) between Ålesund and Geiranger. We were treated to 65 miles of sheer breathtaking beauty, with every mile revealing an everchanging scene – snow-capped mountains, valleys, plateaux, cascades and waterfalls, interspersed with tiny little hamlets clinging to the sides of steep cliffs. Geiranger is said to be the pearl of the many Norwegian Fjords, and it certainly lived up to its name, the weather, as usual, being perfect.



Geiranger Fjord

From Geiranger an excursion had been organised, for those who fancied it, to leave the ship and to be driven by coach through spectacular countryside in the mountains back to Ålesund, where they would rejoin “Midnatsol” in the evening. We did not fancy this trip and preferred to remain on the ship and to see again the beauties of the fjord.

Inside Geiranger Fjord – Cascades in full spate.



We returned once again to Ålesund where we were to collect the excursionists after their mountain sortie.

Ålesund from the sea.



With its snow-capped mountains as a backdrop and its art nouveau-style buildings the town looks very attractive. We had decided to go ashore during the stop of one hour. The ship was greeted by a Brass Band marching toward the quay.



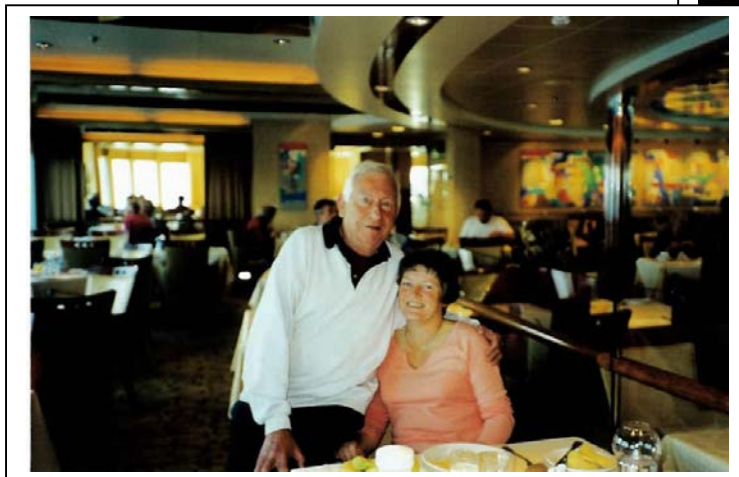
On our walk through the town we noticed a “Vinmonopol” – a place authorised to retail alcohol. Alcoholic drinks are very expensive in Norway because of the tax levied to enforce moderation. We entered to discover prices of wines. The shop had French and other wines at considerable savings compared with shipboard prices. So we bought three bottles and had to pay in cash. Our visa cards are perfectly acceptable but the Government does not allow purchases of alcohol by credit card – again, in order to discourage easy and perhaps irresponsible purchases .

On this second day aboard we sampled the restaurant for breakfast and lunch. For the former we found a plentiful choice – chilled fruit juices, tea and coffee, cereals including porridge, cold meats and fish, bacon (sometimes) and eggs, scrambled or fried, a selection of hard cheeses and of course varieties of breads and toast. Conspicuously absent were fresh fruits which we missed as both of us include apples, bananas and grapes in our breakfast diet, plus any available seasonal fruits, such as apricots, peaches, plums, etc. Only the odd apple and orange was on show for breakfast.

Midnatsol's Restaurant.



At Breakfast



Bjarne the Fruit.



After this first day Lyn asked a waiter, whose name was Bjarne Salvesen, if fruit could be made available. Bjarne promptly disappeared into the bowels of the ship and reappeared with fruit stored all over his person, juggling apples and having bananas sticking out cowboy-wise from his pockets. He was typical of the “desire-to-please” displayed at all times by the excellent crew.

Lunch on board was similarly generous, and like Breakfast, it was “self-service”. As expected there was a large selection of fish (of interest only to Lyn), of cold and cooked meats with vegetables and salads. We found the beetroot to be particularly tasty as it was served not just in vinegar but in a herbal concoction the contents of which we failed to identify – Lyn thought Cloves were included and I thought Dill was an ingredient. Finally there were the Desserts which included fruit salads, tinned pears and pineapples, a selection of rich mousses, other mega-caloried delights, and often ice cream in a variety of flavours. We sampled these liberally.

On leaving Ålesund dinner was served in the restaurant by an army of waiters, the menu being printed in Norwegian, English and German. That night's menu comprised Cream of Shellfish Soup, which we skipped, Medallion of Venison, with lightly fried mushrooms, croustade filled with wild cranberries, Brussels Sprouts, potato tart and Wild Game Sauce. Dessert was Marinated Cloudbberries, a cream cheese mousse with white goat's cheese. (The cheese was white, not the goat!)

After dinner we spent a delightful few hours in the lounge bar on Deck 8, drinking a glass of wine, then later, glasses of refreshing Lime Juice. The lounge was equipped with a piano, and a Sony Music Production Keyboard/Synthesiser. This was owned and operated by Bjorn Andreassen who is a very talented arranger and also a very charming agreeable person. He would spend much of the day compiling and recording music for performing in the evening

Bjorn Andreassen.

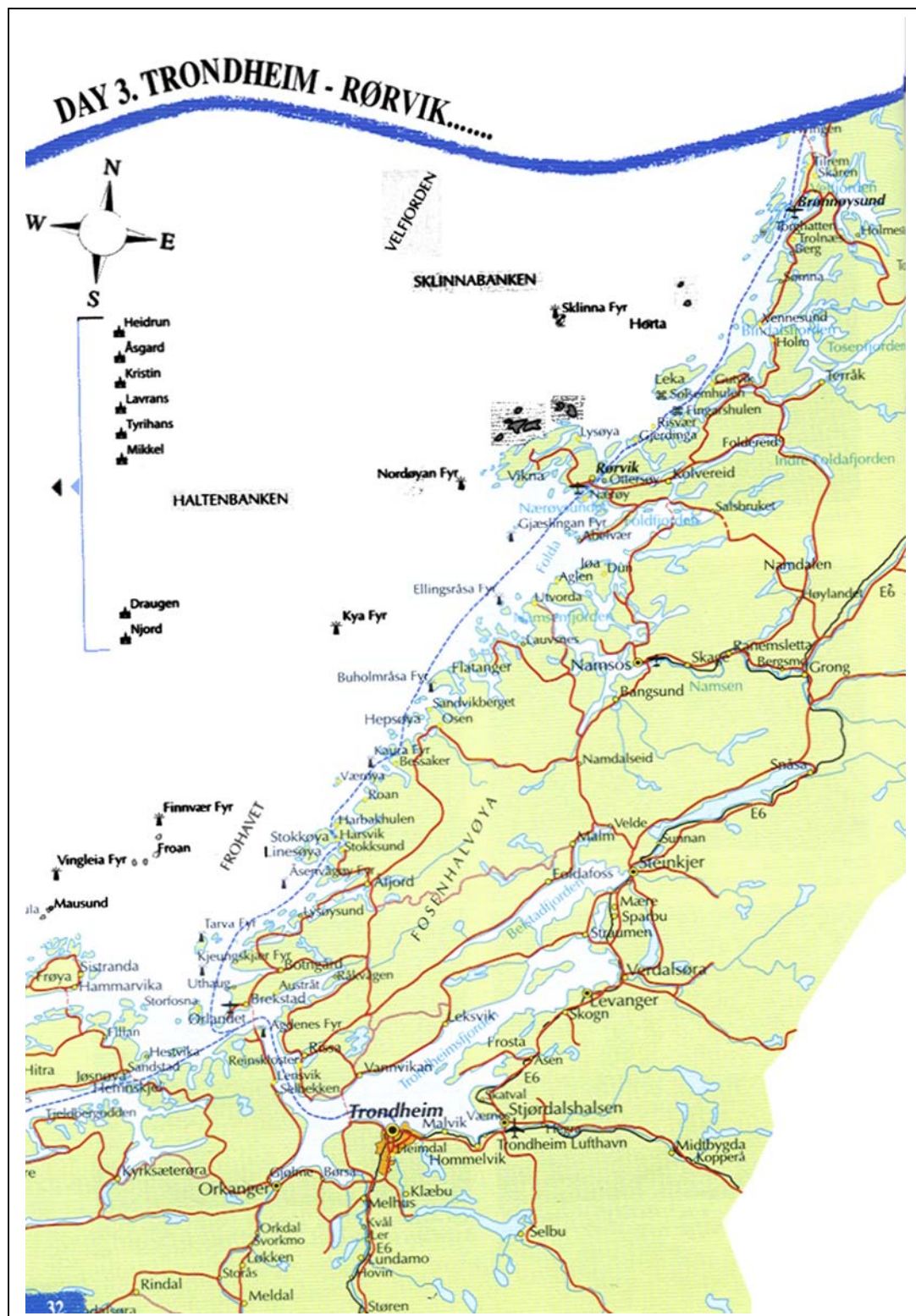


And Douglas von Karajan.



This evening the dance floor was dominated by the "Senior Dancers", a party of Germans on a "Seniordanz" package tour who had spent much of the morning noisily clog dancing on Deck 9. And I mean noisily! It sounded like a regiment of SS shock troops over our heads! Here they danced normally, many of them ballroom standard. One of them asked me to dance but I declined with "its me leg" in best German of course. Lyn had an invitation also which she, too, declined. At 10.30 the sun was still shining through the huge plate-glass windows. As we were leaving the lounge we noticed that two of these huge windows on the starboard side had cracked. We did not find out whether they had cracked from stress or from the "clog dancing" of the Senior Dancers earlier that day. More about that later.

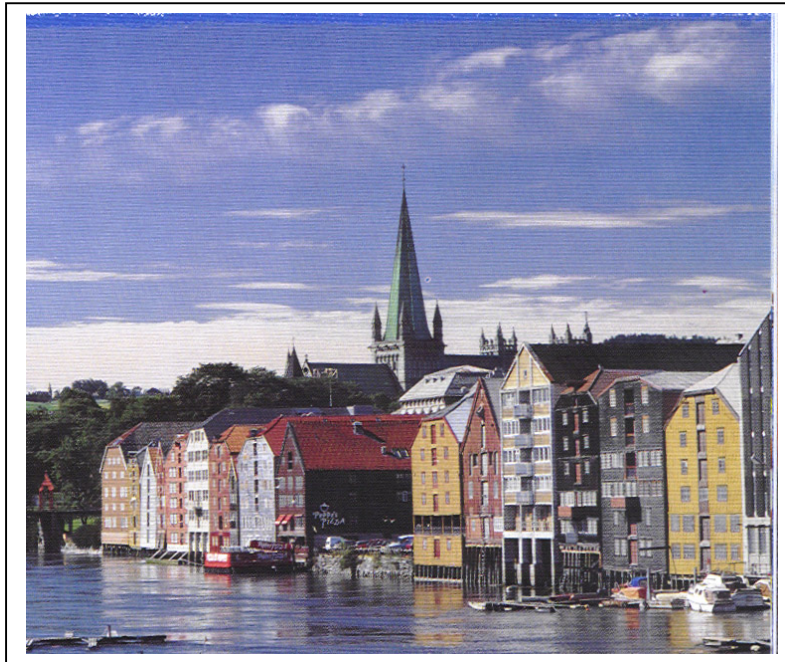
As we were preparing for bed "Midnatsol was approaching the town of Molde. Here we passed another sister ship, the m/s Nordkapp" on her way southwards. Such events were signalled by much hooting on the ship's horn and exchanges of waving by passengers and crew. Ours perhaps was more joyful than those of the sister ship whose passengers were nearing the end of their voyage. We had thoroughly enjoyed our first full day of the voyage and were ready for a good night's sleep. The weather had been warm and sunny as it was to remain for most of the voyage. So warm that many passengers spent a lot of their days on the open Deck 9 basking in the sun.



Chapter 3. Trondheim-Rørvik

Having left Molde at 10 pm. Our next stop was to be 1.45 am. overnight, at Kristiansund. However, when we awoke in the early hours we found ourselves at an unscheduled stop at Fosen, having given a miss to Kristiansund. The reason for this was the broken windows on Deck 8. Fosen is the home of a firm of ship repairers. We took a quantity of equipment and a repair crew aboard and continued our voyage to Trondheim whilst repairs began. Because of the repairs our schedule was changed somewhat. We had to return to Fosen to unload the equipment and repair crew so our stop at Trondheim was foreshortened.

Trondheim, situated just south of the Arctic Circle, is Norway's third largest city, with a population of 150,000. It was once called Nidaros and the city from which earlier Kings of Norway ruled after the country was unified. Now it is the nearest base for many of the Norwegian offshore oil and gas rigs and accordingly prosperous. It boasts a fine cathedral – the Nidaros Cathedral and like most Norwegian towns, it has a busy airport which handles over 2 million passengers each year.



Trondheim

Our next destination after the return to Fosen was Rørvik, which involved sailing across some open sea. We were warned that, depending on the weather, this stretch could be a little rough, exposed as it was to the North Atlantic and unprotected by the strings of islands and skerries along most of the coast. In the event it was fairly calm and the ship rolled only very gently. We arrived at Rørvik at about our bedtime and were off again within half an hour, passing through the narrow straits of Stokksund which, before World War 1, had given Kaiser Willhelm II the willies – so nervous was he that he snatched the wheel from the pilot and tried to steer his ship himself. It is recorded that the pilot said “I’m the boss here” and recovered the wheel.

Before retiring for bed we spent another enjoyable evening in the lounge bar, swigging glasses of Lime Juice which were served free of charge. The bar was run by three very nice young men: Kenneth, Kenneth, and Lars Peter (universally called LP); we nicknamed the two Kenneths, Kenneth the Good and Kenneth the Charming. They

all spoke excellent English, and understood and spoke colloquial English. The crew work the ship for 22 days, that is two successive round trips, and then have 11 days off. They were in the charge of a charming Dane, Benny Pedersen, the Hotel Manager.

Kenneth the Good, LP and Kenneth the Charming



Kenneth the Good and Lyn.



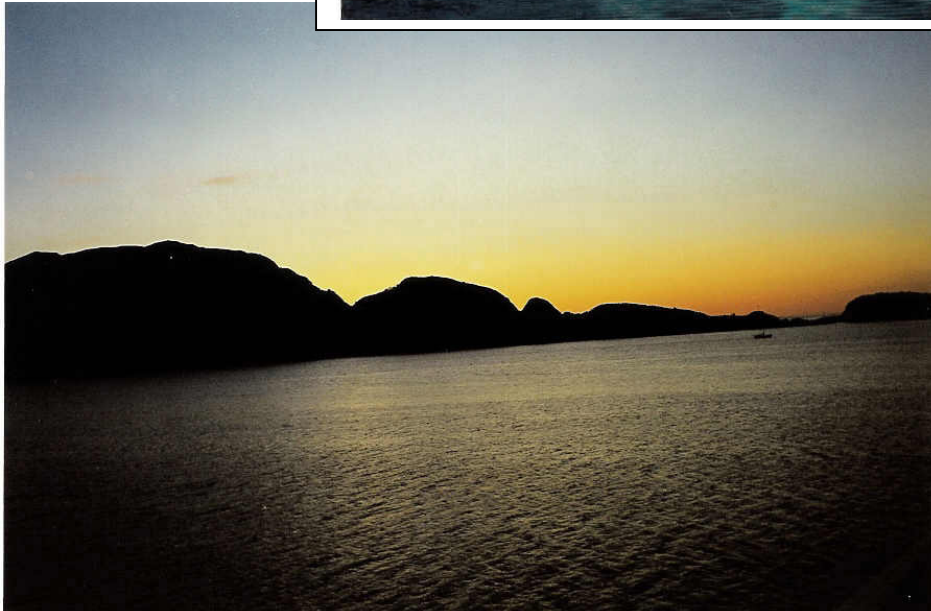
Below: Benny Pedersen.



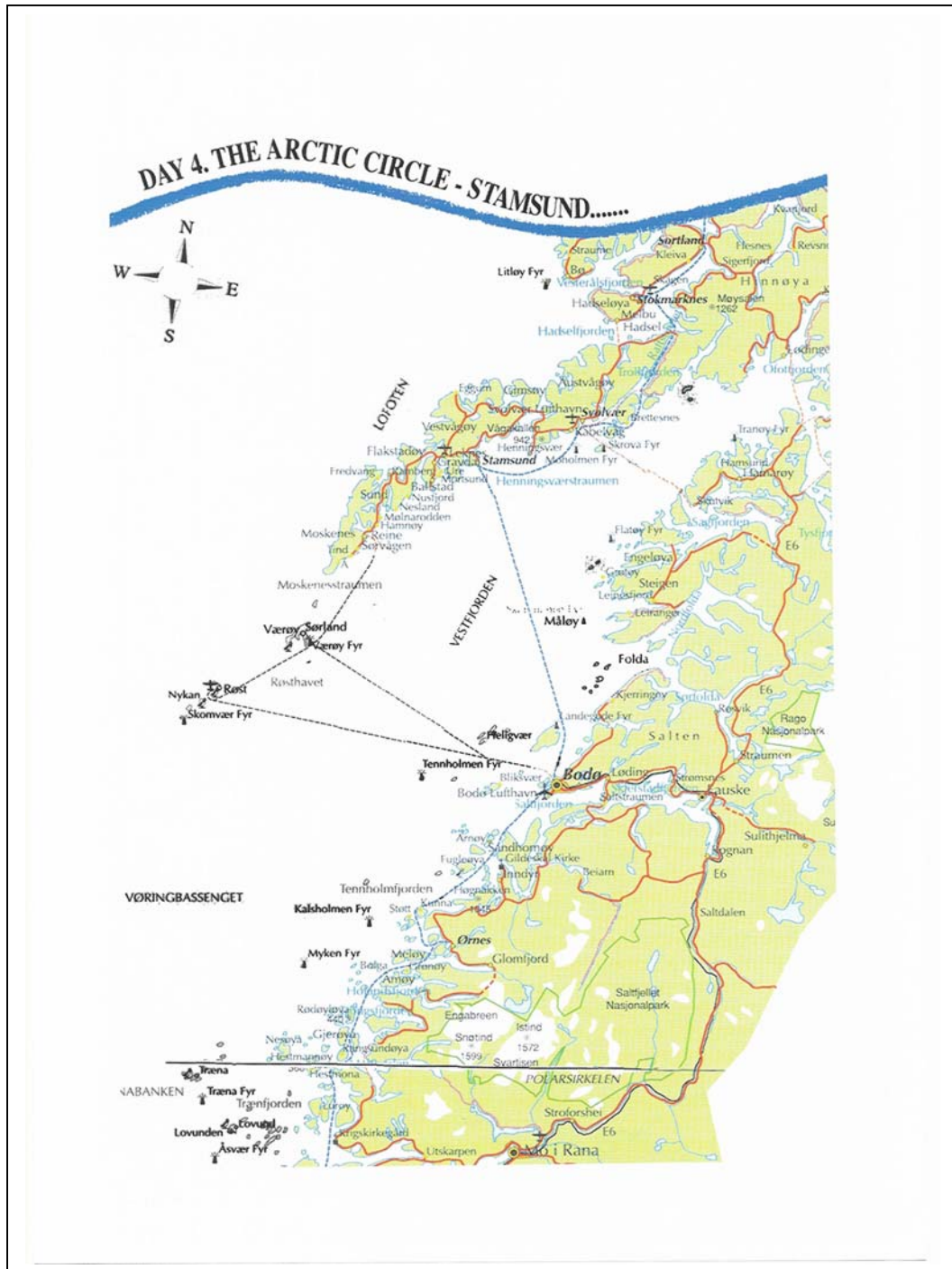


Above: Deck 9.

Molde



At sunset.



Chapter 4. Into the Arctic Circle.

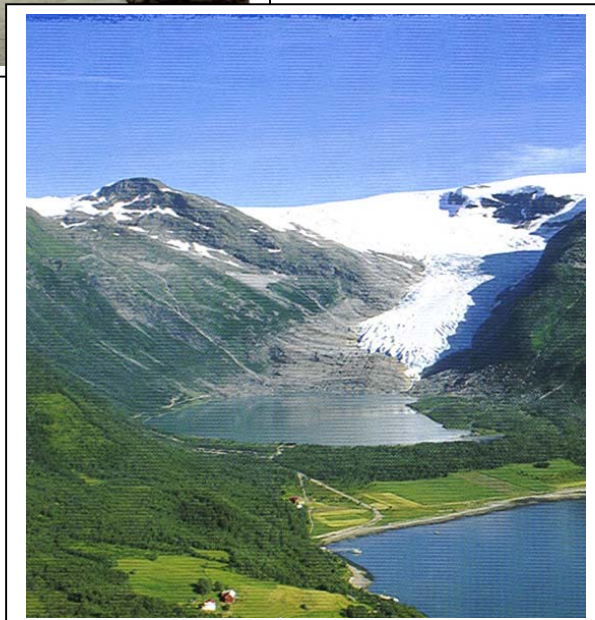
On board, a challenge had been announced for passengers to guess accurately the exact time when “Midnatsol” would cross the latitude 66 degrees, 33 minutes, into the Arctic Circle. As a guide we had been informed that it would be between 06.30 and 8.00 am. During the day passengers were awarded a certificate signed by the Captain, Arild Hårvik, and confirmed by *Njord God of all the Seas* that we had indeed, on 10th May – my birthday – crossed into the Arctic Circle. We were now definitely in the land of the Midnight Sun. Even though the summer solstice was 6 weeks in the future the sun was visible above the horizon for all but about 4 hours out of the 24, and those four hours being mainly dusk.

Our first stop that day was Ørnes, after threading through numerous islands and skerries. The town has a population of 1500 and has a popular beach. Inland from Ørnes is Svartisen Glacier, the country’s second largest glacier.

Ørnes.



Svartisen Glacier.

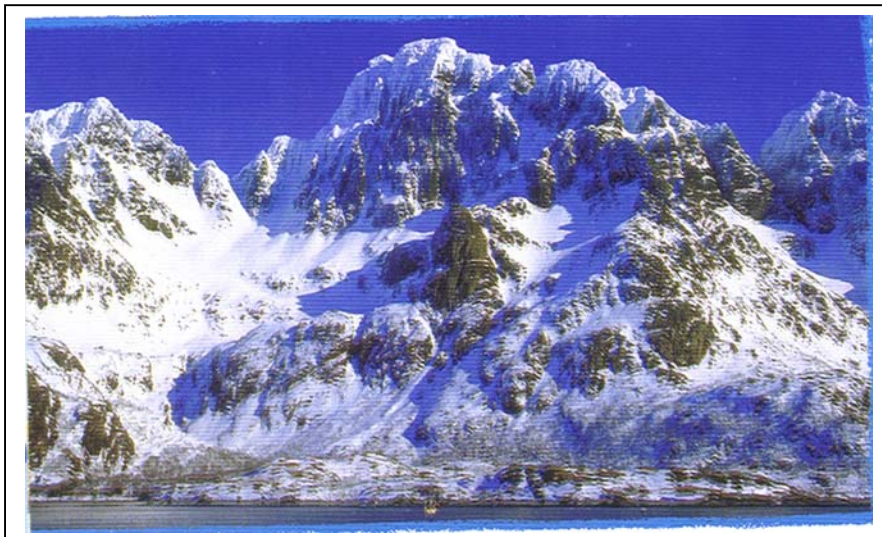


We arrived at Bodø at a little after mid-day. This is an important town being the administrative centre for Nordland County, the site of Northern Norway's defence headquarters, and also the seat of the Bishop of Northern Norway. Its airport handles both civil and military traffic. During the "Cold War" it was used by Nato as one of the landing strips for U2 spy planes.



Bodø.

From Bodø we crossed the Vestfjorden, the open sea between mainland Norway to Lofoten Island. Once again the crossing, which could have been rough, was very smooth, with just the gentlest rolling. Rising defiantly from the sea is the "Lofotveggen", a sheer wall of granite, interspersed with volcanic ravines, stretching for 60 miles down the coast of the island. Warmed by the Gulf Stream, the waters once attracted huge numbers of cod, fished by 20,000 fishermen from all over Norway. Now there are only about 3000 who bring in about 25,000 tonnes each year.



Lofotveggen

We reached Stamsund, Lofoten's largest fishing village tucked under a mountainside, at 7.30 pm. And then turned northwards again to reach Svolvær, the capital of Lofoten at 9 pm. By this time we were again enjoying, as we did most evenings before retiring to bed, the music of Bjorn Andreassen in the lounge bar. The leather

chairs in the lounge were a continual source of amusement each time the overweight men and women plonked their behinds into them, making “whoopee cushion” sounds.

By this time we were feeling very much at home on “Midnatsol”, and were sure that once ashore we would miss her gentle movement in the sea. We were sleeping well, though we needed to draw the cabin curtains to keep out the sunlight. The cabin’s air conditioning system was perfect so that the sun’s warmth did not create discomfort whilst sleeping. Because we found the restaurant times for serving dinner to be too late to suit our digestive systems we had adopted the habit of raiding the food tables at lunchtime for bread rolls, tomatoes and other ingredients for cabin-made sandwiches to eat at a time in the early evening which did suit us.

Approaching Svolvær at dusk.





POLARSIRKEL-SERTIFIKAT

Certificate of Arctic Circle/Zertifikat für das Passieren des Polarkreises/Certificat du Cercle Polaire Arctique

Jeg, Njord, Gud over de 7 hav, gjør hermed vitterlig at

I, Njord God of all the Seas, hereby give witness that / Ich, Njord, Gott über alle Meere, tue hiermit kund /
Nous, Njord, Dieu de tous les océans, attestons que

HUNTINGTON LYN MRS

om bord på MS "MIDNATSOL"

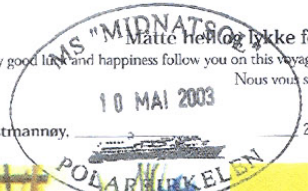
On board - An Bord - A bord

passerte Polarsirkelen, den 10. MAI 2003

Crossed the Arctic Circle / Überquerte den Polarkreis / A passé le Cercle Polaire Arctique.

Matte henn og lykke følge deg på denne reise og for all fremtid.
May good luck and happiness follow you on this voyage and an ever / Möge Glück und Segen Sie auf dieser Reise und ewiglich begleiten! /
Nous vous souhaitons bon voyage et une vie heureuse.

Hestmannøy, _____



Arild Hårvik

Kaptein / Captain / Kapitän / Commandant





POLARSIRKEL-SERTIFIKAT

Certificate of Arctic Circle/Zertifikat für das Passieren des Polarkreises/Certificat du Cercle Polaire Arctique

Jeg, Njord, Gud over de 7 hav, gjør hermed vitterlig at

I, Njord God of all the Seas, hereby give witness that / Ich, Njord, Gott über alle Meere, tue hiermit kund /
Nous, Njord, Dieu de tous les océans, attestons que

HUNTINGTON DOUGLAS

om bord på **MS "MIDNATSOL"**

On board - An Bord - A bord

passerte Polarsirkelen, den **10. MAI 2003**

Crossed the Arctic Circle / Überquerte den Polarkreis / A passé le Cercle Polaire Arctique.

Måtte hell og lykke følge deg på denne reise og for all fremtid.

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Nous vous souhaitons bon voyage et une vie heureuse.

Hestmanney, **10 MAI 2003** 20

Arild Hårvik

Kaptein / Captain / Kapittin / Commandant





Chapter 5. Harstad-Tromsø-Sikervøy

Overnight, fast asleep we had missed witnessing our passage through Trollfjord, at its mouth only 100 metres wide, and Raftsundet, a 20 km. (12miles) long strait which forges miraculously through between the islands of Hinnøya and Austvågøy. Not to worry as we should be taking the same route in daytime on the return leg of our voyage.

We awoke to find “Midnatsol” threading its way carefully between islands, steering in just about every point of the compass, until we reached the port of Harstad on Hinnøya Island. Harstad is a town of some 23,000 inhabitants which once flourished during the “Herring years” at the end of the nineteenth century. Since then the town has developed industries, including shipbuilding and ship repairs. Most recently it has become the headquarters for oil exploration in the region. It also has good fertile regions for grazing and for dairy production. After a brief call at Finnsnes, a town of 5000 inhabitants, we pressed on to Tromsø.

Harstad.



Finnsnes.



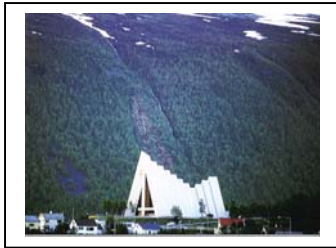
We had been impressed by the manoeuvrability of “Midnatsol” in narrow waters and when putting into harbours, many of which had quite restricted space. We had noticed that the ship had side propellers, as well as two stern propellers. As the Captain later explained to us the ship has no rudder, the side propellers enabling it to “park” sideways at quaysides very easily. This was another example of Norwegian shipbuilding ingenuity, along with its shallow draught for navigating tight straits in the fjords despite its great size.

Another surprise for us was the lack of visible wildlife. There were plenty of common seabirds, gulls, cormorants and shags, but we saw none of the more exotic species such as Puffins and Sea Eagles which we had understood to be in profusion. Even on various “bird islands” which we passed on the voyage there was very little sign of them. Special excursions were organised to view bird sanctuaries en route, but we did not take advantage of their availability. Perhaps another time.....

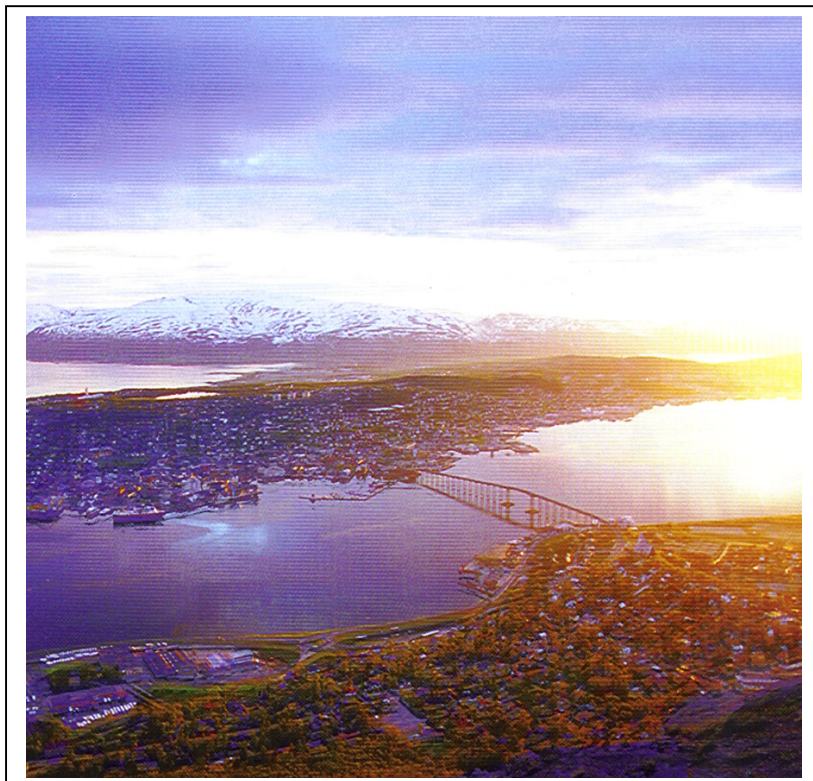
Tromsø



Approaching Tromsø
Under bridge spanning
1016 metres.



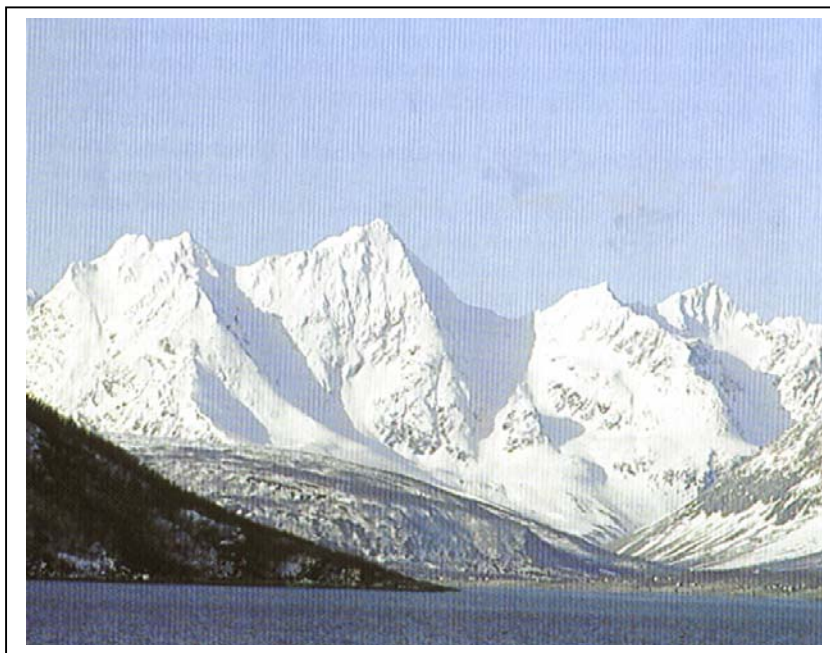
Above: The Arctic Ocean Cathedral, Tromsø.
Below: Aerial view of Tromsø



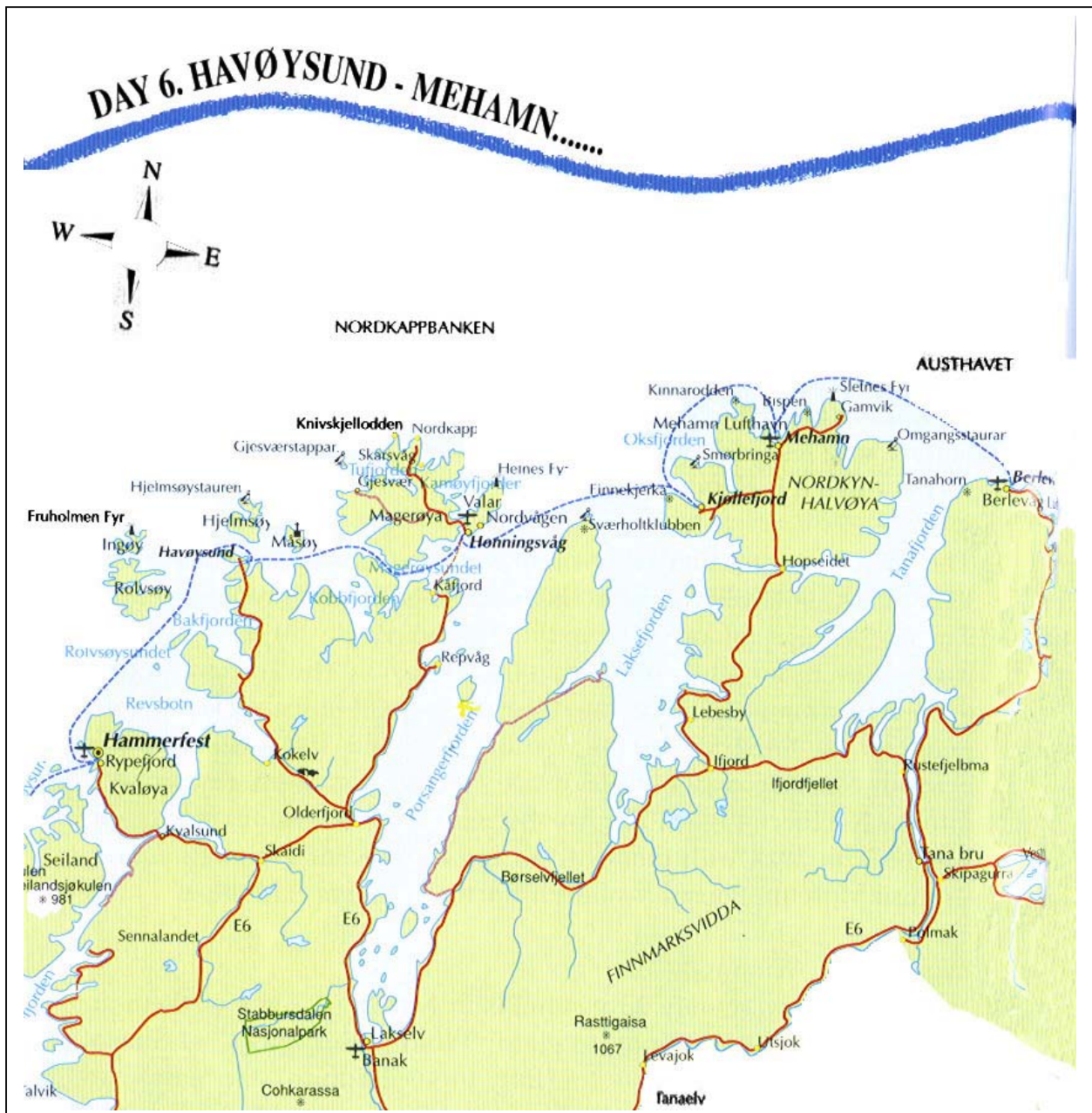
Tromsø is the capital of Arctic Norway and is home to some 60,000 inhabitants, known by some as the “Paris of the North”, though the people of St. Petersburg in Russia might dispute this claim. We approached the city under the fine bridge, pictured on the previous page, which links it to the mainland. However, so great was the volume of traffic that a road tunnel has been built under the strait. A further tunnel under the town itself leads out to the busy airport, which handles about 600,000 passengers each year. Not far from Tromsø is the fjord in which British bombers in 1944 finally succeeded in sinking the 44,000 tonnes German warship *Tirpitz*.

We had four hours in Tromsø so we decided to go ashore to find a Vinmonopol as we liked to have an occasional glass of wine between our frequent glasses of iced lime juice – no chance of our suffering from scurvy on this voyage! We were foiled, as it was a Sunday and the Vinmonopol was closed. We resumed our games of Monopoly there being no Vinmonopol. We had packed, for our voyage, Scrabble, Monopoly and a pack of playing cards, and often, after lunch and a brisk walk around the decks, we would retire to one of the lounges for a game.

The next stop after Tromsø was Skjervøy which we christened “Scurvy” as this was easier to pronounce. As we arrived at about 11 pm. the reader will not be surprised to know that we were asleep in our cabins – so quiet and smooth was the ship that we were rarely conscious of the many night-time stops made during our voyage. More about “Scurvy” later as we were to call there again on our return voyage. Suffice to say that from this point on as far east as the Russian border all the towns we visited looked new. The reason for this was that in 1944 when the Germans were being driven back from occupied Norway by the invading Russian Army, the Austrian General Rendulic was ordered by Hitler to destroy all of North Norway as far south as Lyngen Fjord. This was to slow the Russians’ advance. Consequently every house in Northern Norway was burnt and the population forcibly evacuated. These towns have all been rebuilt subsequently. Here and there, individual German groups, as a token of remorse, have voluntarily helped rebuild some of the churches.



Lyngen Fjord.

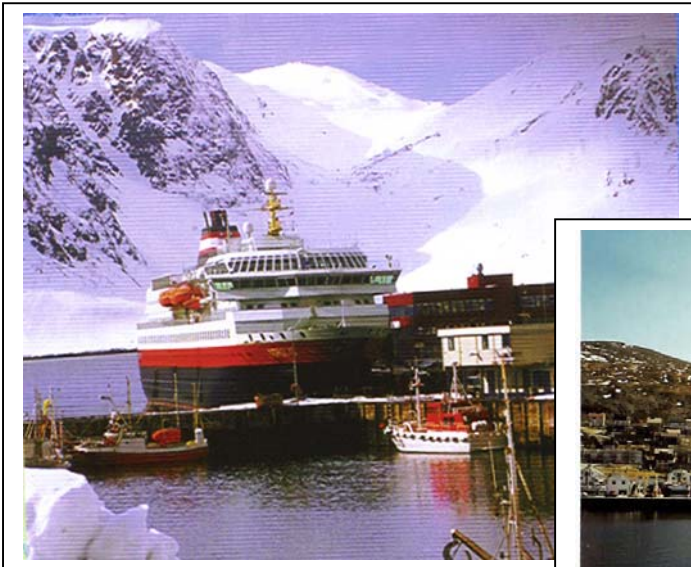


Chapter 6. Hammerfest, Havøysund, Honningsvåg, Mehamn.

Overnight from Skjervøy “Midnatsol” called at Øksfjord and at Hammerfest. I had been particularly interested to see Hammerfest. Like Narvik, Hammerfest had figured frequently in avidly listened-to news bulletins during the 1940 invasion by Germany of Norway. These towns had been the scene of fruitless and costly efforts by Britain to aid Norway in her defence. However, by the time we had emerged from sleep, the ship had cleared Hammerfest harbour and we would have to await the return voyage to see the town, the northernmost town in the world.

By the time we had finished breakfast and Lyn had collected her day’s supply of fruit from Bjarne, “Midnatsol” was threading her way, once more, between islands and the mainland, reaching Havøysund at about 9 am. The Captain put on speed in order to make good time to Honningsvåg, from where an excursion overland by coach was planned, taking passengers to the North Cape.

Honningsvåg.



We docked at Honningsvåg before midday where the “Midnatsol” was to stay for four hours. We decided to go ashore briefly to buy a few bottles of wine as the occasional glass we were buying on board was so expensive. We easily found the Vinmonopol, had a brief look at the inevitable souvenir shop and started to make our way back to the ship. Rounding a corner we were in time to see “Midnatsol” reversing away from the quay.

A main cause of stress when travelling is the fear of being stranded or of missing the boat, train or plane. Both of these nightmares seemed to us to be coming true. We were stranded in a remote foreign place, only 1000 miles from the North Pole, with no passport and only the belongings we stood in. We would have to wait here for the ship’s return in about three days or try to catch a plane to its next stop. Had we missed a message about change of plans before we disembarked? These were the thoughts

which raced through our minds as we ran the last 100 yards to the quayside, waving and shouting frantically at the retreating ship. Standing in the prow was a lone crewman staring impassively at our signals.

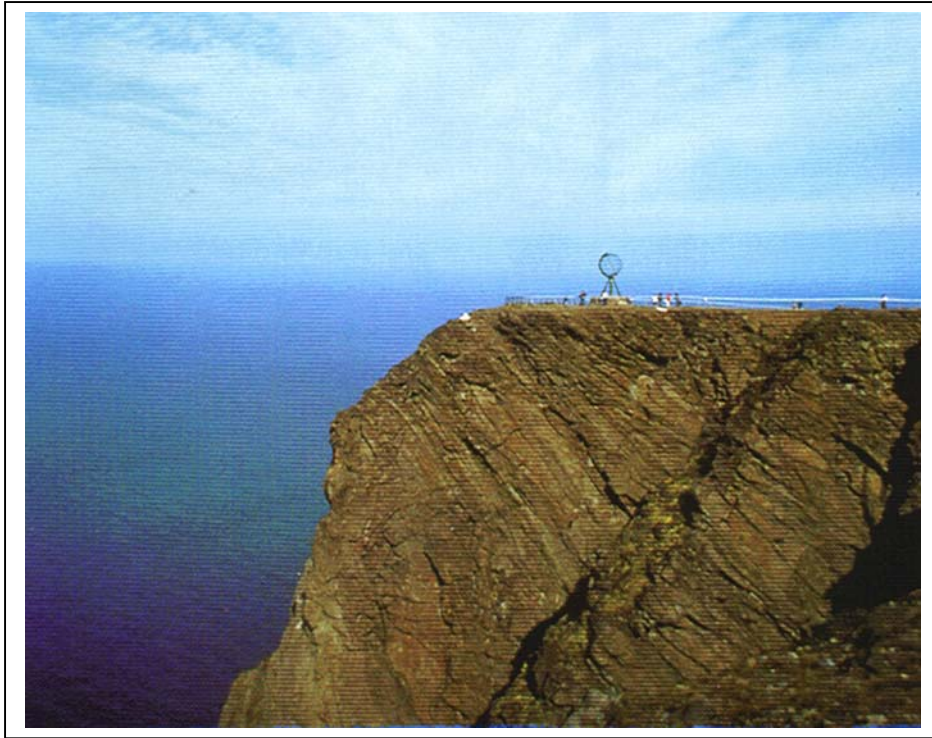
He then pointed across to the quay, and rounding the corner of the warehouse we were thankful to see that the ship's Purser, Peter Bolte, was standing on the quay beside a table equipped with a coffee jug and refreshments. He assured us, and a group of other worried passengers, that "Midnatsol" had only put out to conduct lifeboat drills, "and would be back on the quay in a few minutes".

Our relief was considerable but was mixed with irritation that we had not been forewarned. If any of the worried passengers had been suffering from, for instance, a heart defect, the consequences could have been serious. Peter explained that the lifeboat drill "had to be a surprise to the crew", but we found out later that the crew, but not the passengers, had been fully aware of its imminence.

The "few minutes" became an hour before "Midnatsol" returned to the quayside. On board we demanded to see Captain Hårvik who courteously appeared accompanied by Benny Pedersen, the Hotel Manager, and Peter Bolte. Lyn and I expressed our anger at their irresponsibility in no uncertain terms. The Captain reiterated Peter's excuse, but obviously saw our point and apologised. Thanking us for pointing out their mistake he successfully deflated our anger. A complimentary bottle of wine which later arrived at our cabin completed our mollification.

The ship that got away..... but which came back!





North Cape. Latitude 71 Degrees, 10' 0"

From Honningsvåg we sailed still further north, with the North Cape to our west, on to a tiny port called Kjøllefjord. The sea was as calm as a millpond, the sun was shining from a cloudless sky, and Bjorn was playing his delightful music as we proceeded gently. The sea to the north of us was empty as far as the North Pole, apart from the occasional passing Russian vessel. Another blissful evening.....

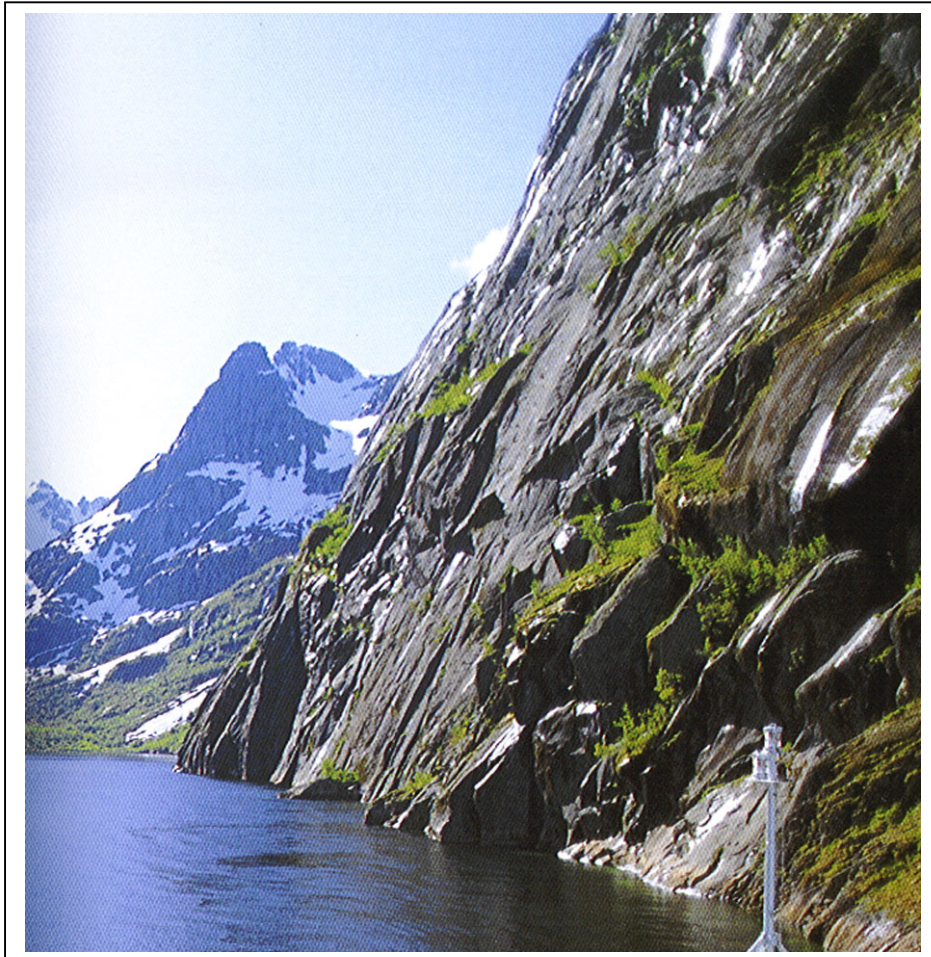
From Kjøllefjord our evening journey took us further north still round another cape, called Nordkynn, Mainland Europe's northernmost point, at Latitude 71 degrees 8' 0" (Note: Nordkynn is on the mainland of Norway, whereas North Cape is on the island of Magarøya, separated from the mainland by a narrow sound, the Magarøysundet.)



Mehamn

We were preparing for bed as "Midnatsol" put into Mehamn, a small fishing village. The Mehamn Hotel boasts that it has Europe's northernmost hotel room (room number 301). Further east is mainland Europe's northernmost lighthouse, Sletnes. In these parts many landmarks are mentioned as the "northernmost this or that". Whilst asleep our ship would call at Berlevåg, then overnight would enter the Barents Sea on its way southwards toward Kirkenes.

By now we had travelled about 1000 miles up the length of Norway and we had continually wondered at the geology and history of the landscape. Each day brought views of differing varieties of rock, of the volcanic and glacial shaping of the land, and of the strange layering and stratification of the rock. Often the strata of rock would be vertical or near vertical as illustrated in the photograph below.



Likewise, all along the coast, we saw great U shaped valleys coming down from the mountains to the sea level. We decided, when the opportunity presented itself, to try to find some answers to questions which these sights raised: How was this striking landscape formed? What enormous natural forces shaped this land? When?

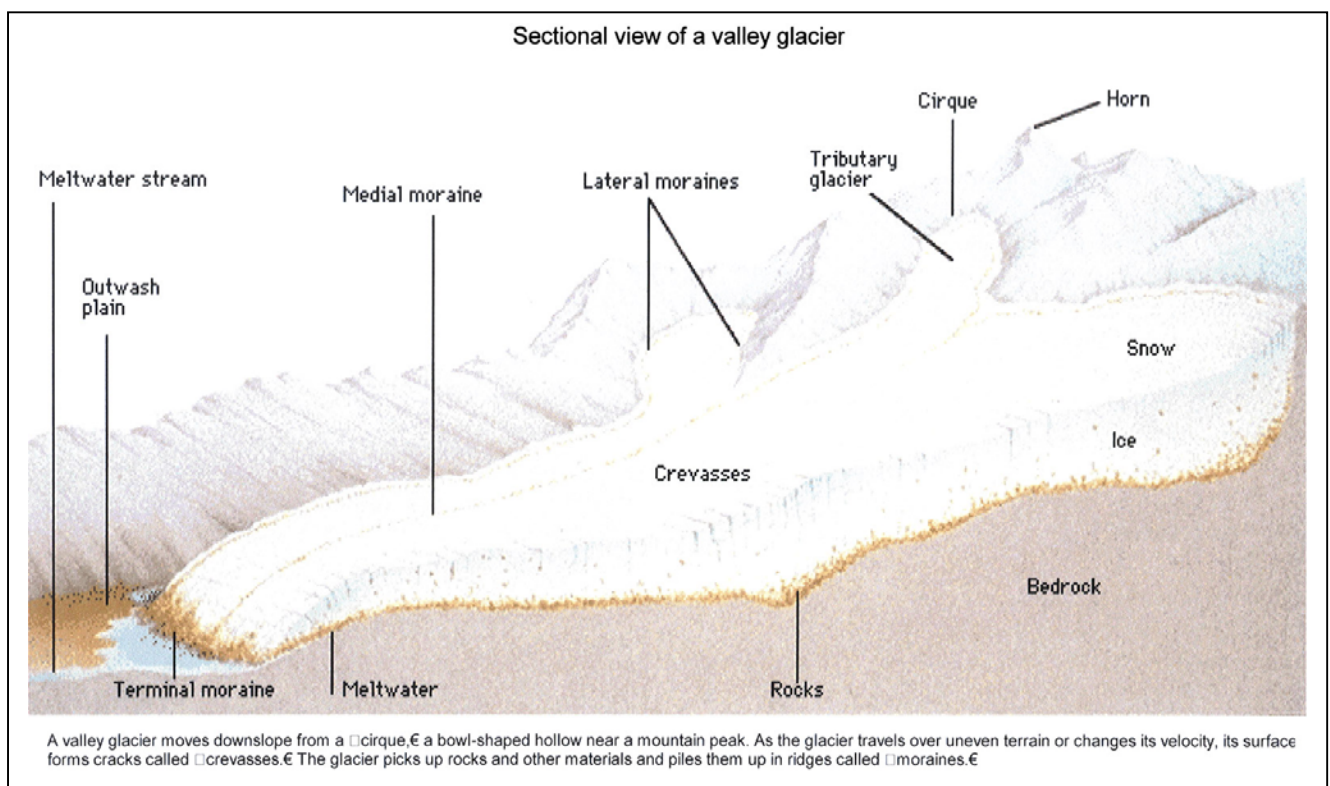
We have since, our return from Norway, sought books on the subject, and quizzed the Geological Institute in Bergen. So far no comprehensive books on the subject have been found, though there are available numbers of articles and theses written by scientists, mainly in jargon incomprehensible to laymen. The institute in Bergen tells us that a book is indeed under preparation but is not yet published.

The final touches to Norway's formation, it seems, were made by the Last Ice Age - the Pleistocene Ice Age. (Or more accurately, perhaps, it should be described as the Present Ice Age as this "Last Ice Age" said to have ended 10,000 years ago is apparently still receding.) Presumably the next ice age is in the offing, hopefully though, many thousands of years hence.

Norway has many long narrow inlets of the sea, called *fjords* which we in Britain call *firths*. These make the coastline the most jagged and rocky in the world. The longest, Sogne Fjord, extends inland for 127 miles. The country has a coastline of 1647 miles, but including all the fjord and peninsulas the full length of the coastline is about 13,267 miles – approximately half the distance round the world. About 150,000 islands lie off the Norwegian coast, some of them are only rocky reefs called *skerries*

Glaciers, as the ice age began to recede, began to move and as they passed over the land they helped to shape its features by erosion and by transporting and depositing rock debris. The ice mass, which at the peak of the Pleistocene Ice Age, reached a depth of 10,000 feet (2 miles), locked up so much water that the sea level was at least 300 feet lower than it is now. As the huge glaciers began their melt they began to move under the pressure of their own weight. Many gouged out U shaped gorges in former river valleys. They left behind soil and rocks, often in mounds and ridges called *moraines*. Low places which had been scoured out by the ice filled with water, forming lakes and fjords.

Scientists have measured changes in the level of the ground to determine the extent of the glaciers. The great pressure of that enormous weight of ice in the centre of the sheets pushed the underlying rock down. Rock along the edges of the sheets reacted by bending upward, hence the sometimes vertical strata as pictured on the previous page. As the ice melted, rock under the centre rose, and rock along the edges sank. Some of this adjustment is still occurring.



Many of our questions were thus answered but consideration of the enormous forces of nature still leave us bewildered and awestruck.



Chapter 7. Vadsø, Kirkenes and northwards again on the return leg.

We awoke on the morning of May 13th to find ourselves approaching Vadsø, having stopped at Vardø in the early hours. To the south of us lay the Russian coast. A tannoy announcement told us that we were as far east as St. Petersburg and Istanbul.

We docked at Kirkenes - the end of the first leg of our voyage – at about 10.30 am. The town is just a handful of miles from the Russian border, and a party of passengers had elected to take a coach ride to the border to stare across into that land. We disembarked to explore and Lyn set about collecting a few small pieces of local rock of various colours. The town has a population of about 5000 and is the terminus for domestic flights within Norway.



Kirkenes from the air
And from the sea.



We were looking forward to the return leg because the voyage had been planned in order that we should be seeing and calling during daylight those places which we had missed seeing at night on the way up.



Benny, Moi & Peter

Below: Him & Her
At Kirkenes.



Vadsø Church.



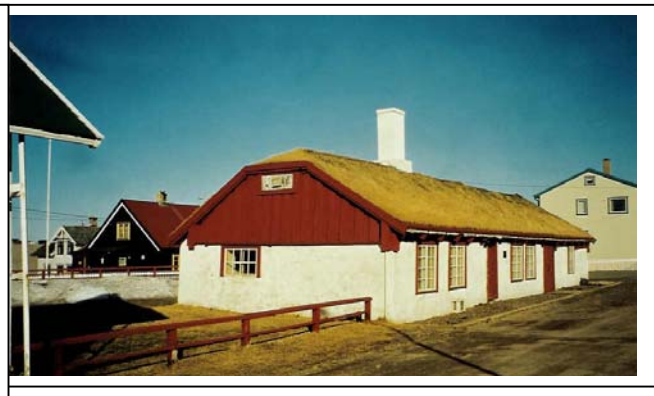
After three hours docked at Kirkenes, “Midnatsol” set off northwards again to round the Harangerhalvøya Peninsular before turning west, and then south on our voyage home. En route we called at Vadsø and later in the afternoon, at Vardø. This town is situated on the easternmost tip of the peninsular and during World War II was fortified and used by the occupying Germans as a base for attacking Russian and Allied shipping in the Barents Sea. Many of the guns are still in place and serve as a tourist attraction. During the Cold War the adjacent coastline was used by *NATO* for its early warning system and the radar tracking and listening devices are all in evidence.



Left: Vardø, note Radar Dome.

Below left: Europe’s most northerly pub.

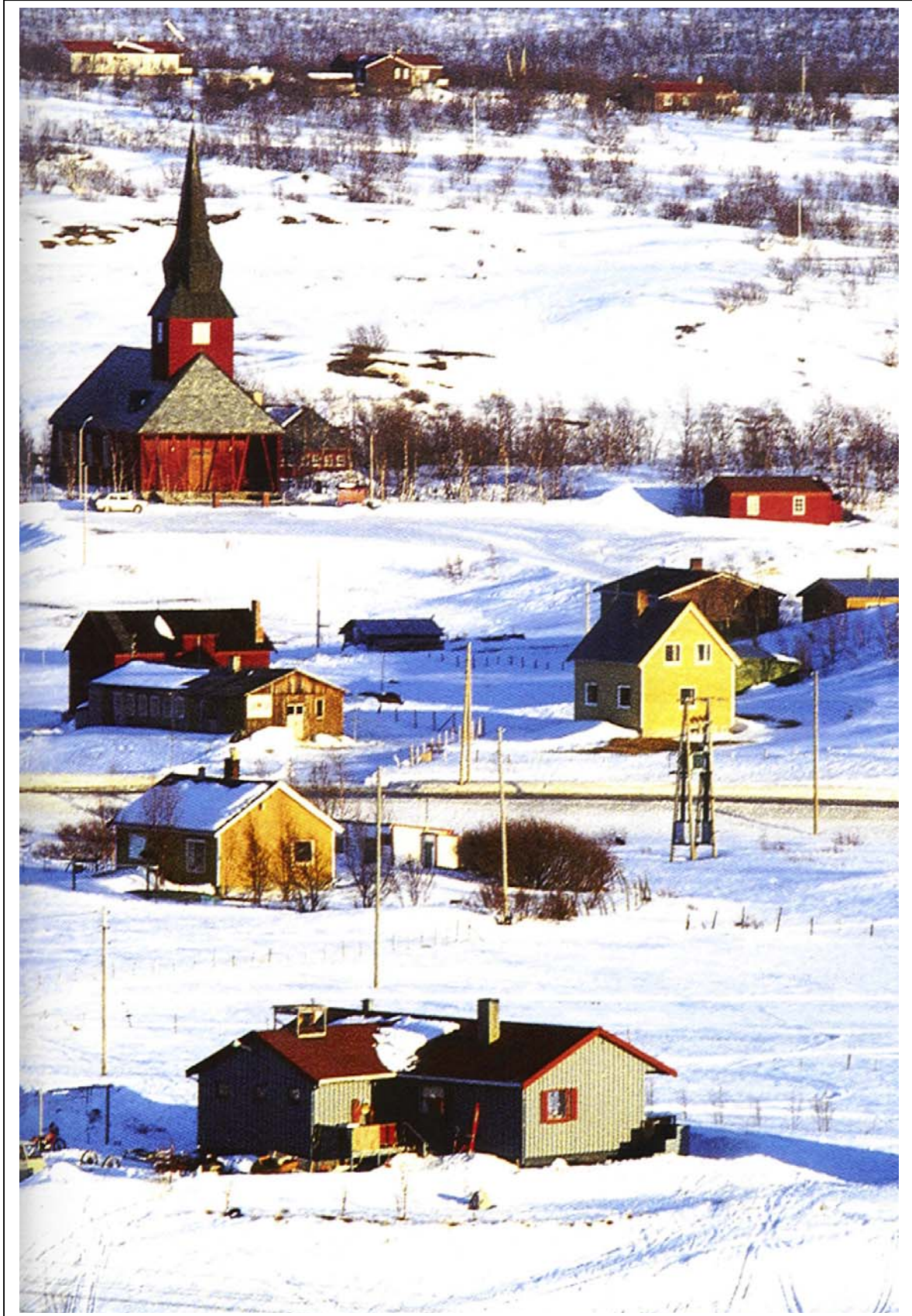
Below right: Grass-roofed cottage.



We went ashore and duly admired the fortifications, and on our walk spotted a preserved cottage with a grass roof, which looked quite cosy. We also came across “The Polar Bear”, which, it is claimed, is Europe’s most northerly pub.

Leaving Vardø we continued westwards, calling at Båtsfjord as we were preparing for bed, and at Berlevåg just before midnight.

A Christmas Card Scene in Finnmark.

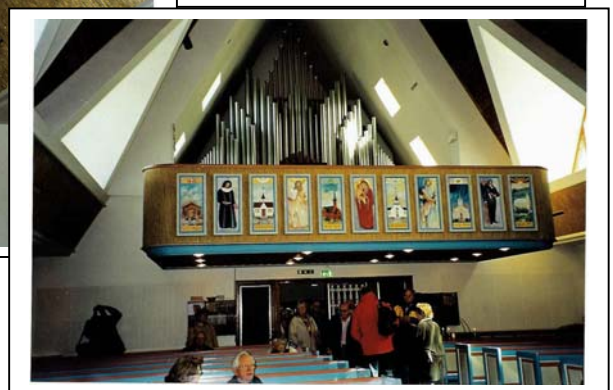
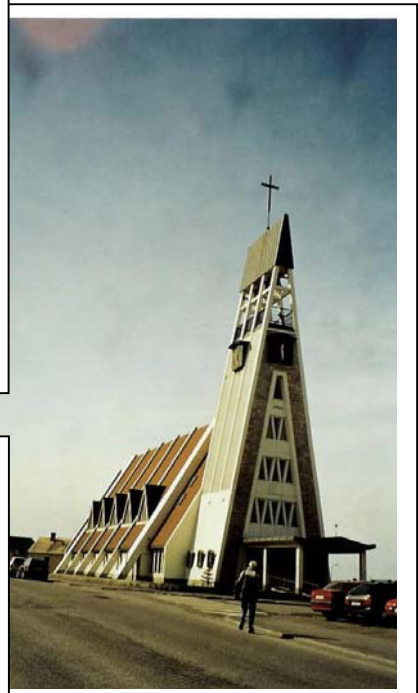




Chapter 8. Turning Southwards to Tromsø.

Overnight “Midnatsol” called, at Berlevåg, Mehamn, and Kjøllefjord, putting in at Honningsvåg briefly at about 7am. Then on to Havøysund. Today the population is 1400, but before World War II it was a mere 150. Undoubtedly a reason for this increase is the existence of oil and gas deposits off the coast.

We then headed for Hammerfest, standing on Latitude 70°39'48", where we had called overnight a few days beforehand, and which we reached at about 9 am. A two hour stop enabled us to explore the town and particularly the spectacular Church. Hammerfest has a population of 9000 and was a base for the German fleet operating in the North Atlantic from 1940 until 1945. The Church was well worth the visit.

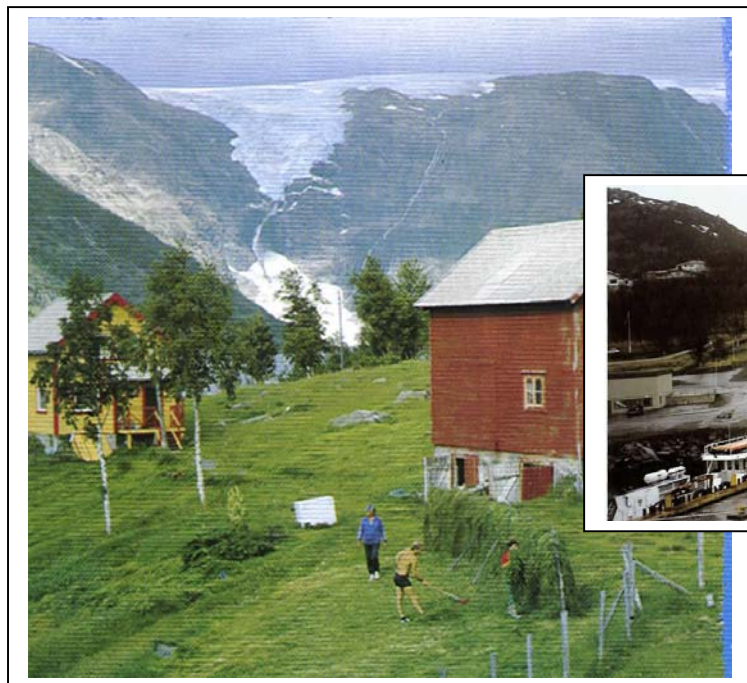


Hammerfest Church.

It was another beautiful day and we left Hammerfest at lunchtime to resume our voyage to Tromsø via Øksfjord and Skjervøy. We passed through the Sørøysundet, the sound between the mainland and Sørøya, one of Norway's largest offshore

islands, to approach Øksfjord with its stunning mountain background. Øksfjordenjøkulen, is the only glacier in Norway which “calves” into the sea. The town, at 70° north, has a population of 1400 and once flourished from the huge herring shoals which attracted many fishermen and kept a fish processing plant busy.

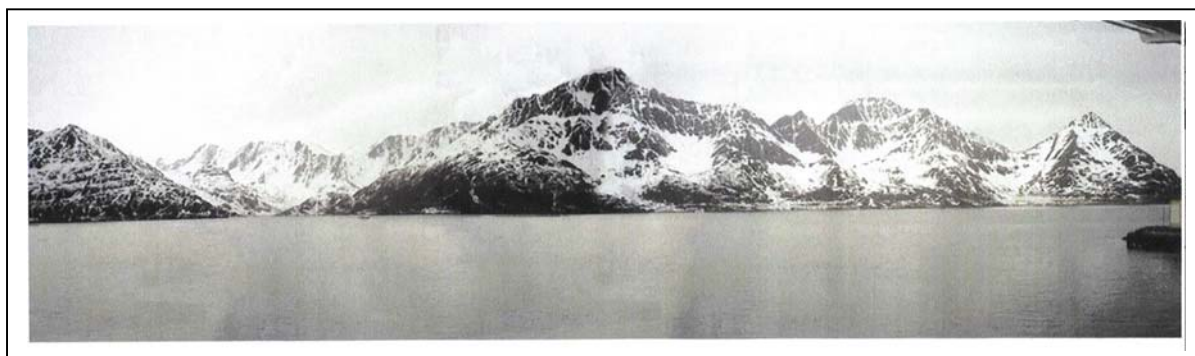
Øksfjordenjøkulen Glacier.



Øksfjord



Below: Approaching Øksfjord.



Our next call that evening was Skjervøy, (“Scurvy” as we had named it on the outward leg). We reached Scurvy at about 8 pm. In the Lounge Bar our friend Bjorn was rehearsing for a special occasion – the Norwegian National Day, three days hence on Saturday May 17th. He spent a lot of time arranging his own version of the Norwegian National Anthem and all the crew were building up excitement about the celebrations understood to be in preparation. We did not particularly share their joyful anticipation, feeling that it was all a piece of jingoism. We Brits have become cynical about Nationalism, feeling as most of us do that these days we have little about which to be proud.

We reached Tromsø just before midnight and by breakfast time next morning we should be approaching Harstad and later in that day pass through Raftsundet the sight of which we had been robbed a few nights earlier on our northward journey.

Approaching Skjervøy.

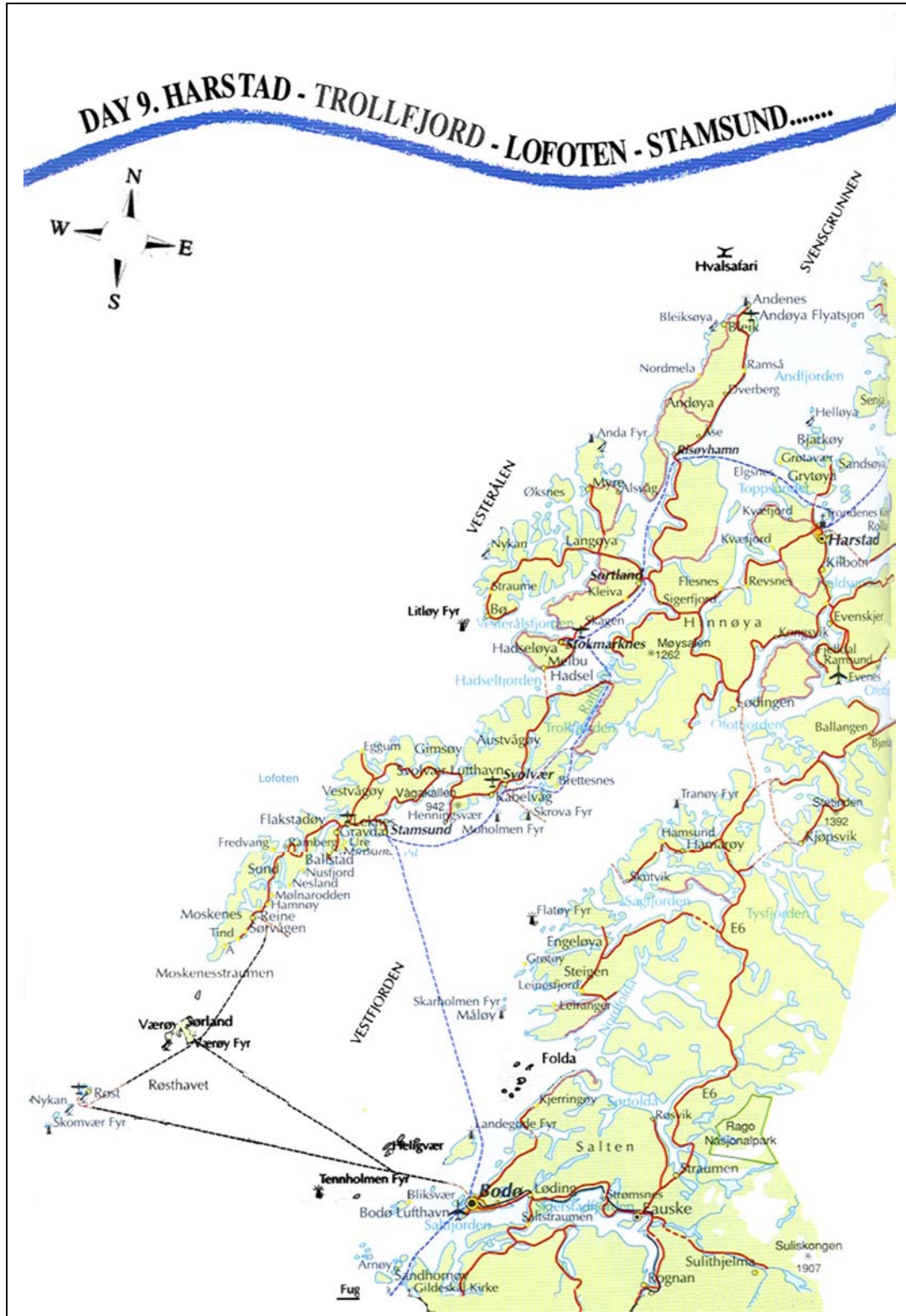


Passing M/S Finnmarken



The Churning Wake.





Chapter 9. Harstad-Trollfjord-Lofoten-Stamsund.

Our ship had docked at Tromsø at just before midnight, then continued a couple of hours later without disturbing our sleep. Our arrival at and departure from Finnsnes likewise went unnoticed and after breakfast we put into Harstad, (See Chapter 5.) staying for a mere half hour before pressing on. At Risøyhamn we navigated gingerly through a 3 mile long man-made channel in shallow waters, opened in 1922 by King Haakon VII. At the end of this channel we passed under another magnificent bridge linking two islands and spanning 1100 yards.

Our next stop was at Sortland, a place of green arable fields within the Arctic Circle, being sheltered by the hills to the west. It is the headquarters of Norway's coastguard which patrol a vast area in the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea.

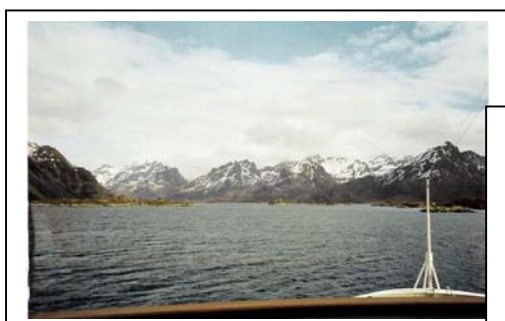


Left: Sortland.

**Below:
Sortland Bridge 1100 yards
Linking Langøya & Hinnøya**



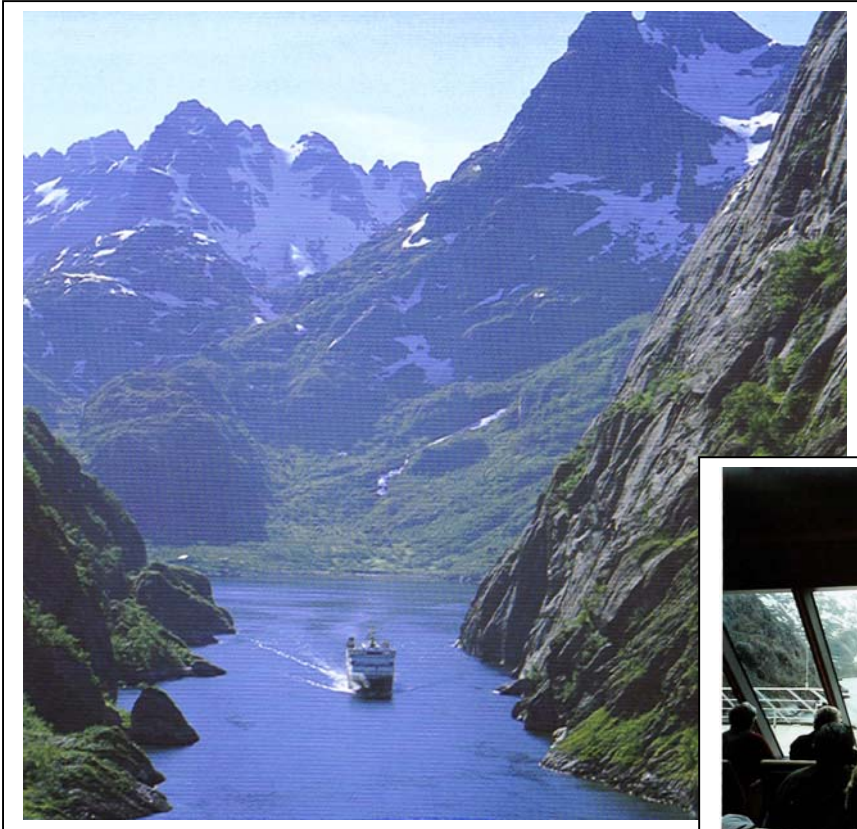
Our next port of call was Stokmarknes which we reached at mid-afternoon. This has 3500 inhabitants and has fish and shrimp process plants as well as lumber yards. A large hospital serves the area's 8000 inhabitants. This is where Richard With, the founding father of the Coastal Express established his enterprise.



Left and below: nearing Stokmarknes.



During that afternoon we passed through Raftsundet having seemingly been headed straight for the wall of a mountain. Raftsundet is a 12 mile long sound between towering sheer mountains, 3000 feet in height. The safe passage through this strait is due to the Captain's skilful navigation and also to the depth of the water between the steep cliffs, allowing our huge vessel to pass. For this event most of the passengers were assembled in the Observation Lounge over the prow of "Midnatsol".

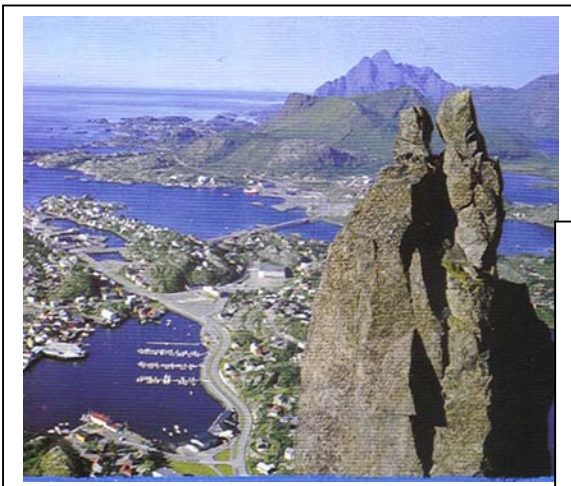


Raftsundet.



More excitement was to come for no sooner had we cleared Raftsundet than we entered Trollfjorden, which is only 100 yards wide at its mouth. The passage is a mile and a half long and the ship only clears the sheer mountain walls with a few feet to spare on either side. Lyn went to the starboard side and felt that she could almost touch the rock.

Cleared of Trollfjorden we were now nearing Svolvær which we had called at overnight on the outward leg.



Left: Svolvær from the air.

Below: Fish drying – Svolvær.

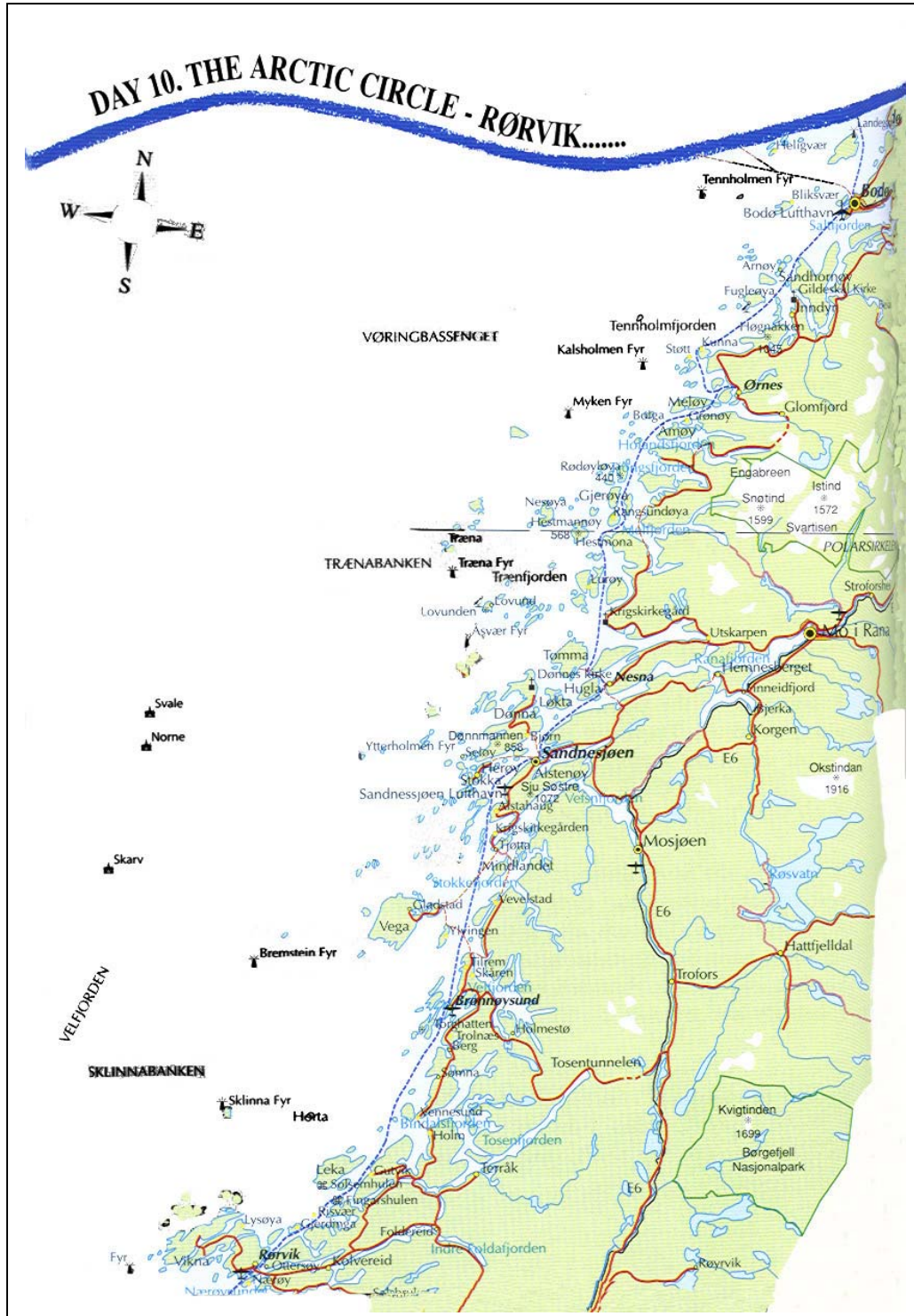


Svolvær is the capital of the Lofoten Islands. In the forefront of the aerial picture of the town is “Svolværgeita” – the “Goat Mountain of Svolvær”, so named for its two noticeable horns. Bold climbers have been known to jump from one horn to the other. More than any other Norwegian town Svolvær was the fishing capital of the country. At the end of the harbour wall is a poignant statue of a fisher wife anxiously gazing out to sea in hope of espying her husband sailing homeward. Also adorning the harbour walls are the fish drying racks, on which *Klippfisk* is produced by splitting and drying codfish to preserve them for marketing. A high volume of exports to Europe was enjoyed by Norwegian fishermen. In Iberian countries *Bacalao*, made from boneless Klippfisk was a much sought-after delicacy.

M/S “Midnatsol” continued southward down the coast of Lofoten Island during the evening. This was Thursday May 15th and the crew were getting quite excited, as were the passengers of Norwegian descent, about the forthcoming National Day, two days hence. A competition was announced to judge the best banner (materials provided) carried on the day. As mentioned before, Lyn and I took all this with a pinch of salt in a rather superior way. Our day ended with another evening spent in the Lounge Bar, listening to more of Bjorn’s delightful music – and also to more, less delightful, “Whoopie Cushions”. Overnight “Midnatsol” would call at Bodø and by breakfast time we should be approaching Ørnes on our voyage southward.

Below: Stamsund.





Chapter 10. Bodø-Ørnes-Nesna-Sandnessjøen-Brønnøysund-Rørvik.

This was the day when we left the Arctic zone of Norway and passed over the *Polarsirkelen*, the Arctic Circle. We reached Ørnes early in the morning in a high breeze which, when walking along the port side of “Midnatsol”, felt strong enough to blow us overboard. We reached the town of Nesna shortly after crossing the Arctic Circle, the location of which is marked offshore by a metal globe on a skerry.



Lyn on the Arctic Circle, Day 10.



Nesna with marina.

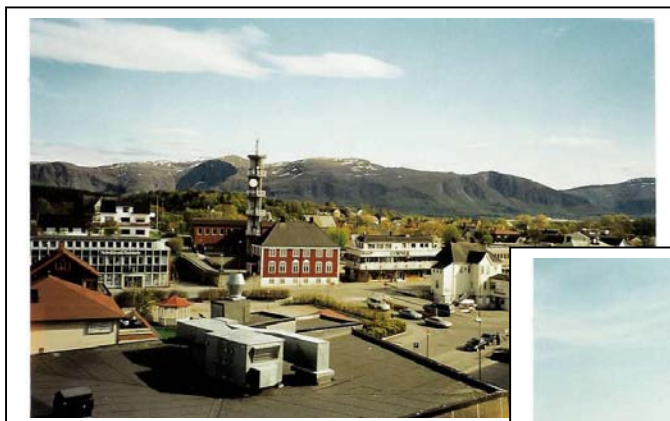
Below: The “Seven Sisters” near Sandnessjøen.



According to legend, trolls are turned to stone if they do not hide before the sun rises. This was also the case for the 7 beautiful sisters who, as mountains, are still just as beautiful. They are named, from left to right: Botnkrona (height 3000 ft), Grytfoten (3000 ft), Skjaeringen (3000 ft), Tvillingene (2800 ft), Kvasstinden (3000 ft), and Stortinden (2900 ft). “That is only six names” you point out. Well, one of them has twin peaks!

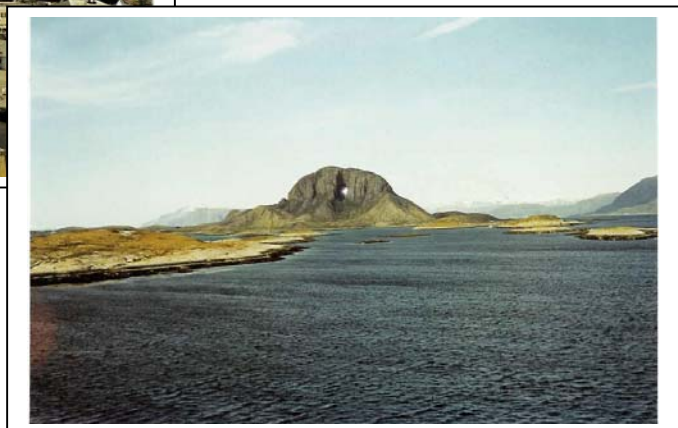
A little further south at Tjøtta is a war cemetery. The Soviet star marks an area where 7551 Russian Prisoners of War lie buried. It is also the burial site of the prison ship *Riegel* which was accidentally bombed and sunk killing 2578 prisoners – Russians, Czechs, Poles and Norwegians, and the German crew. (Compared with the 1508 people who died when the *Titanic* sank.)

It was late afternoon when “Midnatsol” docked at Brønnøysund, a town of 3000 inhabitants. A 600 yard long bridge leads over the Brønnøysund Strait connecting it to Torghatten, one of Norway’s best known natural phenomena. 350 ft above sea level the mountain has a hole right through its centre, 180 yards long, and 15-20 yards wide. Scientists believe that the sea must have washed against a weak part of the mountain when the land was much lower than it is today.



Left: Brønnøysund.

Right: Torghatten.



That evening we had been invited by Captain Hårvik to visit the Bridge of “Midnatsol”. We had been looking forward to this experience. We duly presented ourselves at the appointed hour when the Purser, Peter Bolte, met us and advised that the Captain was slightly delayed as he had a meeting with his officers. Undoubtedly this had to do with the next day’s celebrations for Norwegian National Day. He was only a little late and we were ushered into the Bridge compartment, where the Captain, a slightly shy person, greeted us and proceeded to show us round.

The first thing which surprised us was the Bridge appeared to be almost deserted. Only Captain Hårvik was there with a female officer, who disappeared immediately. It was slightly disconcerting as we had imagined a Bridge swarming with busy officers and crewmen. It was reminiscent of my one-time imaginings about aircraft equipped, as they are, with automatic pilots – it would be equally disturbing to enter a plane’s Flight Deck, to find it devoid of aircrew. The second surprise was the absence of a Wheel with a bearded salt lashed to it for safety. Captain Hårvik pointed to the the control panel by his chair in which a joystick was used for any necessary manual navigation.

This is the computer age and the ship was controlled by computers for all but the most delicate of navigational tasks within narrow and dangerous sounds. The computers are programmed for the course to be followed and then left to get on with it. I just hope that the ship’s computers do not “hang” like Lyn’s and mine!! The bridge was filled with screens monitoring the performance and status of its equipment.



Control Monitors.

Left: The Bridge.

Below: Captain & My Mate.







Chapter 11. Norwegian National Day.
Trondheim-Kristiansund-Molde-Ålesund.

When we awoke on Saturday May 17th “Midnatsol” had docked in Trondheim alongside another sister ship M/S “Nord-Norge”. It was announced that, this evening, a special May 17th Buffet would be provided in place of the usual waiter-service dinner. This we thought was probably to maximise not only the passengers’ enjoyment of the day, but also that of the working crew, on their National Day. The excitement with which they anticipated the day’s events was infectious.



M/S “Nord-Norge” dressed overall for Norwegian National Day.

The infection caused us to obtain a Norwegian flag each and to join in the flag-waving. The celebrations were opened with a speech on Deck 9 from Captain Hårvik, first in Norwegian and then in English and then in German – a nice courtesy. Lyn and I found the sincerity and intense national pride in the Captain’s speech very moving and a copy of it is reproduced at the end of this chapter, together with the text of the National Anthem. Bjorn Andreassen had laboriously moved his equipment up from Deck 8 to Deck 9 and now led off with his arrangement of the anthem which he had been perfecting all the week. The several hundred passengers on deck heartily joined in and we did so too thanks to the Purser’s kindness in obtaining an English translation. The Norwegians celebrated with quiet, joyful, but unboastful, national pride and demonstrated a wish that the 11 other nationalities who were represented among the passengers should equally enjoy the day.

There now followed a parade around the deck, led by the Captain and senior officers, and joined in by the passengers and crew, some wearing “special costumes”, and all carrying flags.

Below:
Lyn & Dick the Dane
A friend we had made.



Parade over we were then served with champagne by Hotel Manager Lenny Pedersen and Kenneth and LP, whilst we stood in the sun, chatting and listening to Bjorn's music. Those wearing special costumes attracted much attention. When Lyn spoke to one lady, complimenting her, she was told that they were not strictly National Costumes but were "Fantasy Costumes" – another example of how well Norwegians speak and understand colloquial English.



Left: Champagne!

Below: A Fantasy Costume.



Next followed a parade of passengers of other nationalities who had entered the competition for the best banner. These had been provided with materials for the purpose. We were then invited to view and listen to the Trondheim Brass Band who would march from the town to the quayside where they would play for us.

Below: Lyn & Benny Pedersen.



About half of the passengers then disembarked and with their flags, marched in a long line round the city, joined en route by numerous natives of Trondheim. On their return “Midnatsol” put to sea again to continue her voyage south.

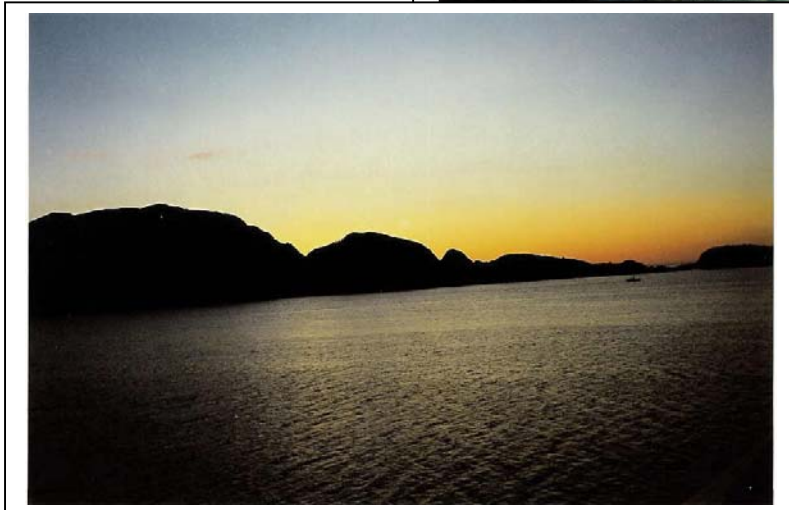
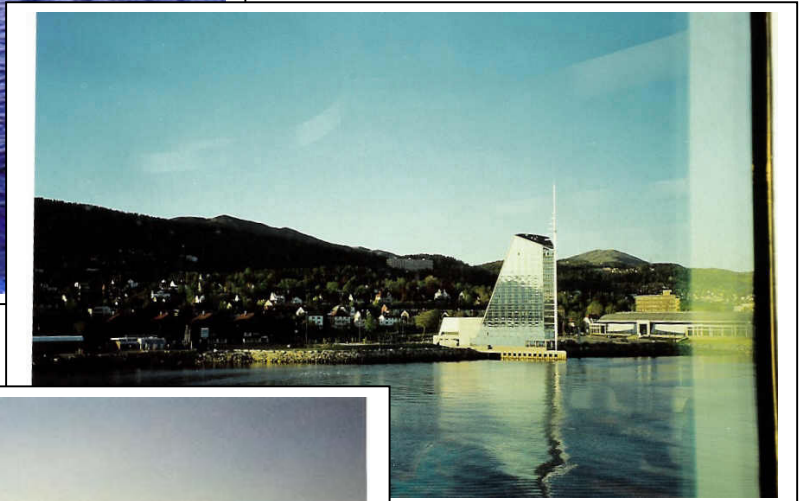
Our next stop was at Kristiansund in the late afternoon. This town had been on our itinerary during the northward leg of our journey, but it will be remembered that the need to replace two large broken windows on Deck 8 had necessitated a change of plan whereby “Midnatsol” had had to miss its call at Kristiansund and to divert instead to Fosen. We arrived for a brief stop at about 5 pm. This ancient town has a population of 17,000 and was once named Fosna, or Little Fosen.



Left: Kristiansund.

Below: Molde.

Below left: Moldefjord at Sunset.



At about midnight we reached Ålesund, staying only about half an hour before pressing on in our final day at sea, eventually to reach Bergen. We were tired, as the crew indeed must have been, for it had been a long day of celebration. We had, before retiring to bed, to start to pack our belongings as we had been asked to have all our baggage ready for collection by 10 am. next morning.

Captain Hårvik's speech on May 17th 2003
Norwegian National Day.



17.Mai tale om bord på M/S "Midnatsol" 2003. (Engelsk)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and happy birthday Norway. As capitan on board M/S "Midnatsol" I wish to say a few words related to Norway's national day.

Norwegians have strong national feelings and are very proud of their country. The 17th of May is the day when this is easiest to see. Important years in our celebration is 1814, 1905 and 1945. These dates are basic in our celebration of our national day and makes this the most Norwegian of all days.

The 17th of May is a day I link with Norwegian flags, newly sprung birch, fine clothes, shining shoes, bands, childrens' parade, ice-cream, long speeches, singing and more ice-cream. A celebration for everybody where the family and the children are the natural center. What makes this day great, is that this is the day when no Norwegians flags out. Everybody flags home.

This is also a day for freedom and unity. We have 12 different nationalities on board M/S "Midnatsol" today, and you are all very welcome to celebrate our national day together with us, because only through friendship and unity with other nationes can we keep our independence and freedom. We strenghten our national independence by making the community the center of this day, and all other days.

Let us celebrate together and take care of each other .
 Have a nice day.





The national anthem

Yes, we love with fond devotion This our land that looms
 Rugged, storms – carred o’er the ocean, With her thousand homes
 Love her, in our love recalling Those who gave us birth.
 And old tales which night, in falling, brings as dreams to earth.

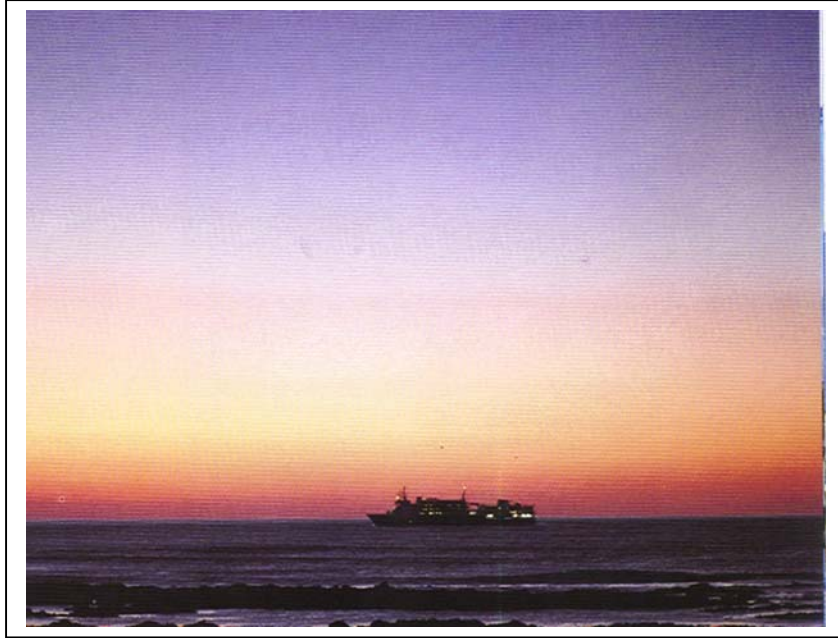
Norseman, whatsoe’er thy station, Than thy God, whose power
 Willed and wrought the land’s salvation In her darkest hour
 All our mothers sought with weeping, And our sires in fight,
 God has fashioned in his keeping, Till we gained our right.

Yes, we love with fond devotion This our land that looms
 Rugged storm – scarred o’er the ocean, With her thousand homes
 And as warrior sires have made her welt and fame increase,
 At the call we too will aid her, Armed to guard her peace



Chapter 12. Måløy-Florø-Bergen.

Nearing journey's end.

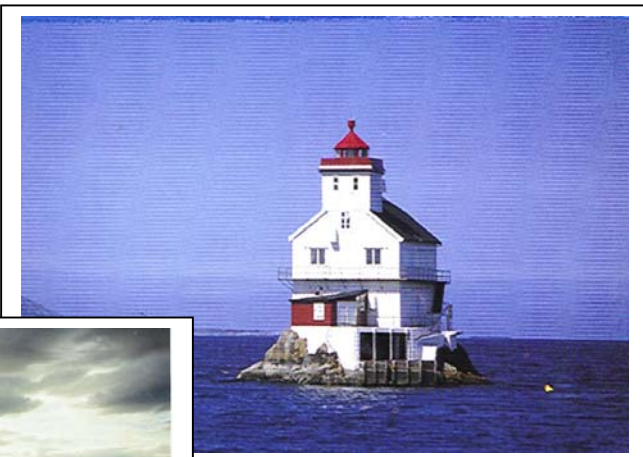


When we awoke M/S “Midnatsol” had just cleared the port of Måløy and was approaching its last port of call before Bergen . This would be Florø which we had called at overnight at the start of our voyage. From here on for the rest of the day’s sailing we would be looking at a changing scene with rather more fertile fields alongside the coast.

Florø has 11,000 inhabitants and plays an important part in the Norwegian Oil Industry, being the supply base for large offshore oilrigs. As we approached the port we passed by the magnificent Stabben lighthouse which guides ships safely into Florø harbour.

Right: Stabben Lighthouse.

Below: Florø



About halfway between Florø and Bergen we had to pass through another very narrow sound, the Steinsundet.

Left: Steinsundet sound.



The coast, as we approached Bergen, became increasingly filigreed with inlets and fjords and the habitations were more numerous where the wealthy citizens of Bergen have built prosperous country dwellings. We saw also an increase in the number of light pleasure vessels plying the waters.

By 2.00 pm. We were within sight of our destination; our bags had been placed outside our cabins and efficiently moved down by the crew to Deck 4, and we had a leisurely last lunch aboard in the restaurant just before we docked in Bergen.

Whilst all the passengers' baggage was being moved ashore, Deck 4 - the point of disembarkation was becoming very crowded with jostling passengers anxious to depart. It is a rather sad fact, noticeable also at airports and railway stations, that though there is no reason for hurry, so many people have to try to be first in the queue. The crew placed the mass of luggage on the quay in groups according to whether their owners were destined for Bergen Airport, or to named hotels. It was all very efficient and rows of coaches were lined up ready, one for each destination. By now it was raining – just about the only rain we had experienced since leaving Bergen twelve days earlier, and we were taken to the Radisson SAS Hotel on Bryggen fairly swiftly.

Once at the hotel, where we had booked to stay an extra day, we had this time no difficulty with obtaining a room with a double bed. It will be remembered that on our earlier stay double beds did not at first seem to exist until we had insisted on one. In the evening we had a leisurely meal in the hotel restaurant, a couple of drinks in the “pub” adjoining the hotel (it was very “pubby”), before retiring to bed. After a long period at sea on a gently rolling ship we took a few hours to become used to Terra Firma and we missed the always-passing scenery. For the next day we planned to do some more exploration of Bergen, where there were some gardens we wished to inspect, to visit the Geological Institute in an effort to learn more about how Norway's landscape had been formed and to inspect a fine three-masted “Tall Ship” which was alongside the quay on Bryggen.

Our plane was scheduled to fly us to Gatwick in the late afternoon of May 13th so we had ample time for our explorations. Firstly though we found that the Institute was closed that day and it was not the sort of day, after all, to go out to the gardens we had planned to see. Instead we did a bit of shopping in the Torgallmeningen, buying a book on the history of Norway, a travelling clock for use on future expeditions, buying a reindeer skin rug which now adorns our sitting room, then photographing the three-master ship in harbour.

Right: The Tall Ship.

Below: Torgallmeningen



Arrived at Bergen Airport which, by international standards, is pretty small, we had a wait of about one hour. We repaired to the bar, once we had checked our baggage through, to have a last very expensive glass of wine. Whilst there, my wallet must unbeknown to me have slipped out of my back pocket. When we came to passport

control the checker took a long look at my face. Chirpily I said "Yes that's me". He asked to see my wallet. I reached to my back pocket, found nothing there, and said I must have lost it in the building. He smilingly produced it from his desk to my relief. Some honest person must have found it in the bar and handed it in.

The flight home was uneventful and we were gratified to find the garden in good order, thanks to Anne Phillips who had worked hard in it during our absence.

Chapter 13. In retrospect.

Both Lyn and I agree that this was the best holiday we have ever had. It included all the necessary ingredients – beautiful ever-changing scenery for the whole period, outstanding hotel service from a crew who were anxious to please, very good catering, comfortable accommodation, plenty of opportunities for onshore sightseeing, space and opportunities for vital exercise, and good weather throughout.

We both agree also that it was a holiday of a lifetime and that we are unlikely to repeat that same holiday. If all else was equally good, we could not depend on a repeat of such good fortune with the weather. Instead we intend to preserve that experience, in our memories, as a one-off. Having said that I am quite certain that our thoughts will return frequently to our Norwegian experience and that we shall be strongly tempted to repeat it.

We left Norway with a warm feeling for its people (even the stowaway cadger of cigars was a charming character), who are kindly, courteous and peace-loving. The rugged beauty of the landscape is breathtaking. Norway is now a rich and prosperous country. It would be easy to attribute this fact to the vast reserves of oil and gas which have been discovered and exploited in the past quarter of a century. Certainly it is an important contributor to their success. But in the same period Britain has also reaped the same benefit from huge reserves of oil and gas in our sector of the North Sea. But whereas we have frittered this bonanza away with little or nothing to show for it, Norway has used it to invest for the future prosperity of generations to come. Communications in this difficult terrain have been infinitely improved by the design and building of new roads and fine bridges, linking isolated islands. Everywhere the equipment of life has been refreshed.

Above all we were impressed by the quiet patriotism of the Norwegian people. It is not based on pride in military strength and achievements, past or present. It is neither jingoistic nor arrogant. The key distinction lies in the word *quiet*. Their pride, I am sure, derives from the nation's survival over generations in a land basically inhospitable, but which they have tamed and in which they now feel comfortable.

Thank you Lyn for another whim our following of which, like many others you have dreamt up, have been successful.

