



FLEMING 55

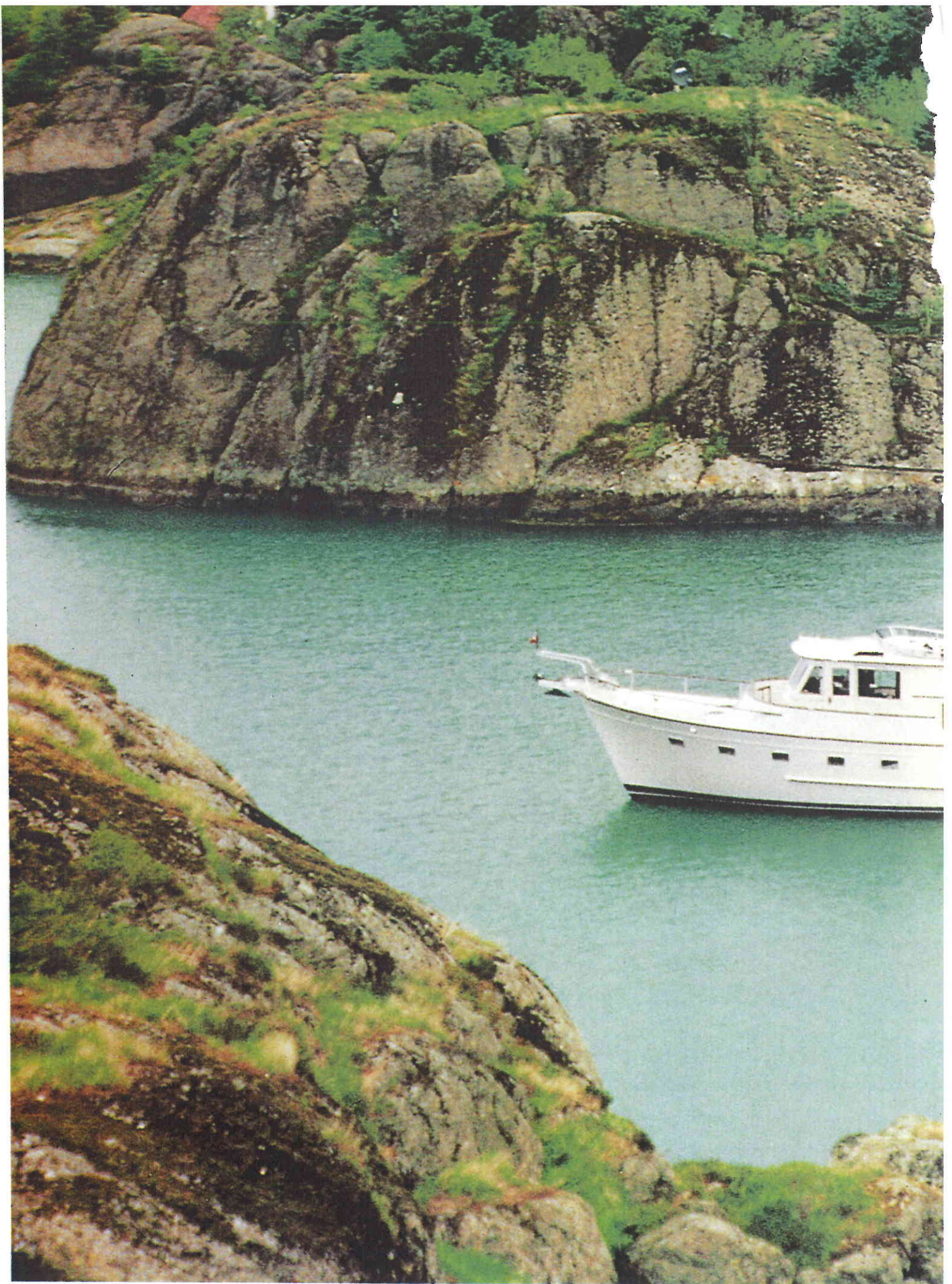
as seen in...

MOTORBOATING & SAILING



FLEMING YACHTS, INC.

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A scenic view of a Norwegian fjord. In the foreground, a white motorboat with a person on board is on the water. To the left, a red wooden house with a white door and window is built on a rocky cliffside. In the background, a larger stone house is visible on a higher cliff. The water is a deep green color, and the surrounding landscape is lush with green trees and rocky terrain.

NORDIC SUMMER

Following in the boat tracks of
intrepid Scandinavian explorers,
the Fleming 55 Ozmaiden ventures
along the rugged coast of Norway.
Have you driven a fjord lately?

Story and Photos by TONY FLEMING



OUTWARD BOUND: *Ozmaiden* entering the village of Hardbakke (opening spread); at Gulen (top left); cruising past Kinn (bottom left).

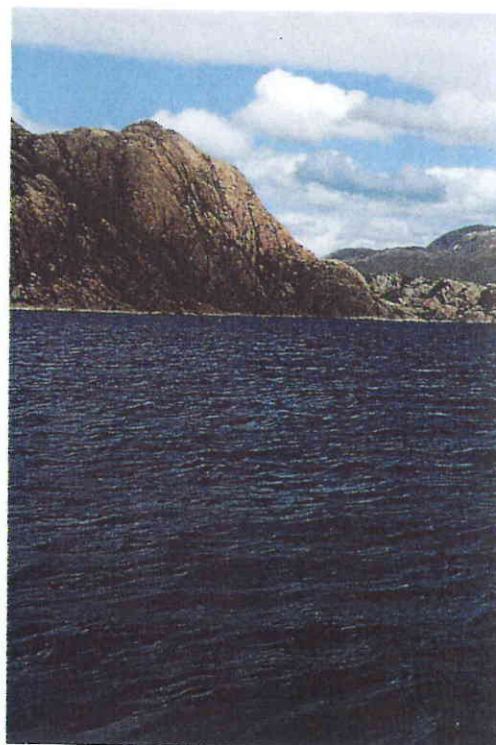
A wall of snow-capped mountains barred our way, their higher peaks hidden behind menacing banks of cloud. Astern, bands of rain blotted out the horizon. Occasional shafts of sunlight pierced the overcast like celestial spotlights. It was not exactly the weather we would have chosen for a cruise to Norway's famous Geiranger Fjord but, as a dramatic overture for what lay ahead, it was hard to beat.

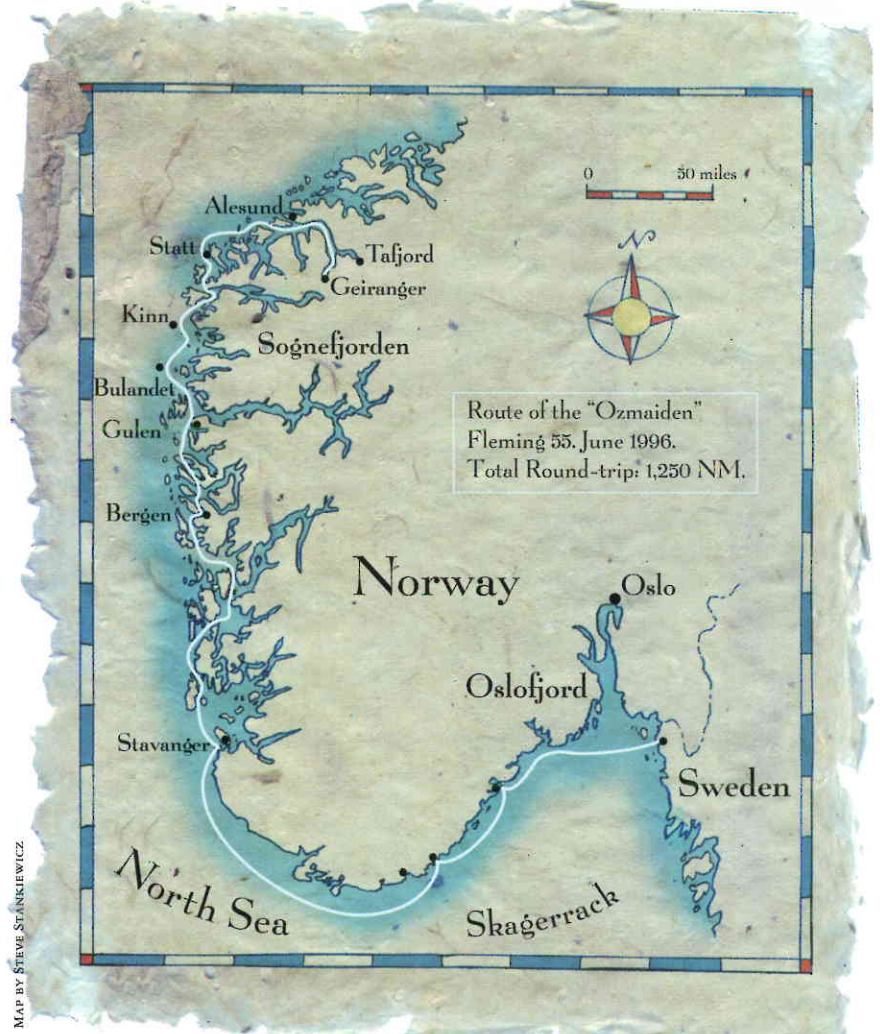
To reach this spot, just 300 miles south of the Arctic Circle, *Ozmaiden's* five-man crew had brought the Fleming 55 more than 600 miles from her winter quarters in Sweden. We had crossed the Skagerrak and rounded the exposed, southern tip of Norway into the treacherous waters of the North Sea where, in the channels approaching Bergen, we picked up an escort of killer whales. These splendid mammals leapt and cavorted around the boat as if to lead the way through the in-

tricate channels ahead of us.

It is hard to envisage navigation through these waters before the advent of modern charts. Imagine yourself surrounded on every hand by a labyrinth of rocks, islands, inlets and channels. The obvious opening proves to be a dead end while the correct way lies through the narrow, rock-strewn creek that starts improbably by heading in quite the wrong direction. Once lost, you could spend a lifetime trying to find your way out of this bewildering maze.

We stopped in the busy port of Bergen to take on fuel and provisions. The harbor was abustle with cruise ships and ferries of all sizes, from those that cross the North Sea bound for Britain to the catamarans that knife their way among the skerries at 25 knots. The city, built on wooded slopes overlooking the harbor and its surrounding waters, is linked to the adjacent islands by bridges built





HEART OF THE MATTER: Norway's fabled Geiranger Fjord (above, left); *Ozmaiden's* itinerary (above); heading into the barren coast (below).



high enough to allow free passage of the shipping on which the city depends.

Founded as a trading center for the Hanseatic League, Bergen is known as the Wooden City. There are many 12th Century buildings, or vestiges thereof, especially in Bryggen, once the center of the medieval city. But, Bergen also is known as the gateway to the fjords, the most spectacular of which lie between here and Alesund. These long, deep coastal bays were created in the last Ice Age when pressure from the ice shield depressed mountain valleys that were subsequently flooded by the sea.

As we ventured farther north, much in the spirit of the great Norwegian explorers like Nansen, Amundsen, and Heyerdahl, the skerries and headlands became progressively more rugged, barren, and devoid of all but basic vegetation. Even under the overcast, the

Continued

sea was a startling aquamarine, a color so vibrant it must have been brought from the Bahamas by the Gulf Stream that keeps these waters free of ice.

But, it was now midsummer and when we reached the small town of Gulen, on the peninsula of the same name near the mouth of the Sognefjord, it was well after 11 p.m. There was barely a hint of sunset. A motor-yacht the size of the Fleming is a rarity in these waters and berthage can be hard to find. In a friendly gesture, so typical of all the places we visited, a passerby phoned the absent ferry whose crew agreed to let us use their dock.

Safely secured in the center of the town, the peace of the endless summer evening settled over us. We sat down to enjoy a wonderful salmon dinner prepared by Egil Paulsen, our host and the owner of *Ozmaiden*.

The school boat

The following day, we headed north and west, crossing the Sognesjoen at the entrance to the magnificent Sognefjord, Norway's longest and most impressive fjord. At midpoint, it is 4,290 feet deep. This had been our landfall in the summer of 1993 following our transit of the North Sea from the Shetland Islands (*MB&S*, February 1994). We visited the beautiful little town of Hardbakke, nestled at the foot of a mountain of bare rock, where the streets wind between boulders the size of houses; apart from a short length of road linking it to adjacent islands, it is accessible only by water. The following morning it was the school boat, rather than the school bus, that disgorged its cargo of kids, colorfully attired in woolly hats and anoraks, on their way to their lessons.

The approaches to the town lie along natural channels bordered by high bluffs of absolutely barren rock. Large boulders, abandoned by retreating glaciers, perch precariously on the slopes and summits. The buds of the ash trees were only now beginning to reveal hints of life within and primroses still peered shyly out from the grassy banks.

From Hardbakke, we ventured out to a collection of small islands and

skerries known as Bulandet. Remote, isolated and exposed, Bulandet is Norway's most westerly settlement and the first to encounter the onslaught of the North Sea gales. The approaches were tricky and we cautiously felt our way among the narrow channels that wind between the low-lying, treeless rocks.

The plaintive cries of the wheeling gulls mingled with the bleating of sheep that cropped the emerald grass. Even in high summer, this was a bleak place and we could not help but wonder what it must be like during the dark days of winter with its long nights and ferocious weather. But the houses were modern and well-kept and local folk came out in their boats to ask if we needed any assistance with pilotage.

Nearby, to the northeast, lies the island of Alden in Aldenfjorden and the mountain of Norske Hesten (Norwegian Horse) from whose saddle-shaped summit streamed a fast-moving plume of cloud. Further north and still on the outer fringes of Norwegian settlement, we skirted the island of Kinn and its prominent landmark Kinnaklova, a huge cloven rock from which it gets its name. Nestled at its foot is a 900-year-old church believed to have been founded by Celts fleeing religious persecution, and still in use today. In Norway, it seems, no matter how remote, the land has been settled and, unlike so many other parts of the world, the settlements continue to prosper.

Rocking-horse ride

Weather is always a factor when cruising in these waters and no more so than when planning to round the Statt peninsula which juts into the turbulent Norwegian Sea like a clenched fist at the end of a defiant forearm. It is known locally as the Cape Horn of Norway and is one of those capes, like Point Conception or Cape Hatteras, that acts like a magnet for winds that can whip placid seas into a treacherous maelstrom in a matter of minutes. It is so notorious, in fact, that serious consideration has been given to boring a huge tunnel at its landward end large enough to accommodate ferries and small freighters.

We kept a daily watch on the weather and studied the steady outpouring of charts that spewed from the weatherfax. A seemingly endless succession of lows marched across the North Sea with barely a respite between them. The local forecast, broadcast in both Norwegian and English, predicted a northerly gale for the next night. By increasing our speed to 14 knots, instead of our normal cruising speed of 10, we figured we could safely transit Statt before the onset of the next gale.

Crossing Sildegapet (Herring Gap) we headed for the open sea and soon began to feel its motion. By Statt standards, this was a calm day and we had the wind and waves from astern, but it was still a rocking-horse ride and the swells exploded against the rocky cliffs and offshore reefs. The gathering overcast foreshadowed the coming gale and it was with a feeling of relief that we reached the protective lee of Skorpa.

The large regional center of Alesund marked the most northerly point for this year's cruise. From here, we were to turn our bows inland toward the mountains. We were made very welcome by the president of the local motorboat club who worked for the harbormaster's office. He made room for us in the inner harbor, which was better protected from the wind and waves. After the remote settlements, it was quite a contrast to find ourselves moored at the very center of a busy town and we wasted no time in visiting its shops and restaurants.

The windowsills of buildings overlooking the harbor were occupied with nesting gulls whose raucous cries filled the air as they squabbled over the limited space. A passerby stopped me in the street and, after asking if I was from the motoryacht in the harbor, warned me to look out for a shallow spot in the channel.

Finally, we began to burrow into the flank of the great Scandinavian peninsula. Gradually the low-lying and barren land gave way to ever steeper slopes clothed with variegated green trees and plants exploding in a frenzy of reproduction. The air was charged with a heady fragrance which flooded our

senses with the very essence of spring.

We marvelled at the isolation of houses perched perhaps a couple of thousand feet above the water's edge with no road for miles and whose only access appeared to be up a precipitous path from a boat-house on the shore. The only apparent reason for a house in that location would be a tiny plot of land sometimes set at such a steep angle that we were told of the farmer who tethered his children like goats to prevent them from tumbling over the edge of his property.

Dramatic landscape

It was hard to grasp the scale of our surroundings. Ahead of us a small white dot metamorphosed into a sizeable ferry. As we headed south into Sunnlyvsfjorden, we passed Tafjord to port, where, in 1934, a slab of titanic proportions had broken loose from its parent rock to create a tidal wave 200 feet high, which swept along the fjord, killing 41 people. As we penetrated deeper into the heart of this dramatic landscape it was easy to

understand how earlier generations, isolated from each other during the long dark nights of winter, could have believed in the malevolent trolls living in these brooding mountains.

Without warning we were struck by vicious gusts of wind. In a matter of moments the air was full of flying spray, slashing the windshield with gusts topping 50 knots and making us appreciate the protection of the warm pilothouse. The radar clearly displayed the speckled bands of rain between the crisp, parallel edges reflected from the rocky shorelines.

Soon we were among the snow-capped peaks whose melt fed the cascades tumbling down the precipices like skeins of silver against the glistening crags. Elsewhere, every cataract would be a major tourist attraction, but here they were a common feature of the landscape.

Despite the inclement weather we donned our padded jackets and headed for the flying bridge, the better to savor the splendors that surrounded us. The

ship's stereo filled the air with Grieg's music as we approached the Seven Sisters falls, where multiple streams tumbled unobstructed down a mighty cliff. As if on cue, a white cruise ship slid through the bottle-green water between us and the falls, a small but elegant counterpoint to the grandeur of the scene.

As we rounded the final curve in the sinuous fjord, we could see the town of Geiranger nestled at the foot of the mountains. Miraculously, the waters were now completely still and we tied up at a vacant dock. The sign said "Seaplanes only" but, due to the capricious weather, all flights were cancelled.

The following day we took a taxi up to 5,681-foot Dalsnibba mountain from where, chilled to the bone in a frozen landscape, we looked down on one of the stars in Norway's constellation of spectacular fjords. *Ozmaiden*, a barely visible white speck against the dark waters, had carried her crew in safety and comfort to yet another memorable destination. ♪

