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BAL TIC

This 1,100-mile circumnavigation tickles your



C I R C L E

senses and tests your piloting skills. By Tony Fleming



The 55' *Ozmaiden* dwarfs her surroundings at Haustensund.

TALK OF CIRCUMNAVIGATIONS conjures up visions of brave little ships defying the dire predictions of the Flat Earth Society. But you needn't be Ferdinand Magellan to join the club—almost any piece of land will do. We chose to circumnavigate southern Sweden in a Fleming 55 pilothouse motoryacht, a boat I designed with naval architect Larry Drake.

We motored on seas, lakes, rivers and canals and collected a trove of memories unlike any that bluewater cruising has given me.

We collected *Ozmaiden* at Malmon's marina on Sweden's west coast just south of the Norwegian border. We set off south across the dancing sea, finding it hard to believe that only 90 days earlier these lively waters had been locked in winter's icy embrace. Narrow channels between the skerries bustled with boats enjoying the Whitsunday holiday.

Individual summer homes clung precariously to the fissured rocks barren of any vegetation save for a dusting of yellow lichen.

The aroma of fresh-brewed coffee drifted up from the galley

Overhead, mares tails of ice-white cirrus swept the clear blue sky, heralding a change in the weather. Tightly packed houses painted in traditional ore-based Falu-red, their gables and windows picked out in white, huddled in little towns. Their inhabitants looked up from their deck chairs and waved as our boat grazed the end of their docks.

Just north of Göteborg, we abandoned the coast and headed out across the Skagerrak toward the offshore island of Anholt. As the sun slid behind the clouds lining the western horizon, the wind and waves increased, fulfilling the earlier celestial prophesy. Through flying spray, we anxiously scanned the skyline for the sectored light marking the harbor entrance and watched it change from white to red as the last of the light drained from the sky.

The following afternoon we arrived in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark and one of the world's great maritime cities. We sauntered along the 320-year-old Ny (new) Havn, munched on smoked eel and ducked our heads under the low bridges on a water tour of the canals. Despite the many attractions of the city we were anxious to start north (by going south), so under cloudy

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skies we waved goodbye to the famous statue of the Little Mermaid and headed for the open sea. Our destination was the small Danish island of Bornholm, 100 miles out in the Baltic. Here we moored at the yacht harbor in the small town of Ronne, whose immaculate cobbled streets are little changed since the 19th century. We shared the harbor with the Danish Royal yacht—clipper bow and splendid gold leaf curlicues across her counter bespoke her status.

An overnight passage across busy shipping lanes took us north up the Gulf of Bothnia. The secluded pilothouse was perfectly equipped for piloting *Ozmaiden* through the steady parade of ships. In the instruments' subdued glow we identified and tracked radar targets for converging courses, then cross-checked and plotted our position on the chart. At regular intervals the aroma of fresh-brewed coffee drifted up from the galley and came served with slabs of sinful Danish chocolate. An orange moon rose from the ink-black sea on our starboard quarter.

Dawn revealed the Swedish coast as a sliver of gray just above the western horizon. Ahead, the southern tip of the slender island of Oland betrayed its presence by the radio towers emerging from the gray water that



now was tinged with pink. Slowly the two bodies of land converged until only a narrow channel, overlooked by Kalmar's imposing 12th-century castle, separated them.

Much of the Scandinavian coastline comprises countless rocks and islands, which demand precise piloting and constant attention. The channels are accurately marked with spar buoys in red and green, rocky cairns known as vardas, and squat lighthouses wearing Chinese hats. But once you lose track of your position, you are hard pressed to identify your surroundings. Fortunately fog is rare and tides are insignificant.

As we approached the outskirts of Stockholm, summer houses began to appear on the islands. Some islets are just large enough to accommodate a single house. Overhead, the sky darkened and thunder grumbled in the distance. We approached the city past the summer homes of Saltsjöbaden and through the narrow winding channels of Lannerstasunden and Skurusundet. Rain began to fall as we entered the harbor past the huge icebreakers *Oden* and *Frej*, still scarred from their winter-long battle with the elements.

Stockholm, Sweden's capital, is a maritime city built on a series of islands in waters that are fresh to the west and salt to the east. The medieval city of Gamla Stan





and came served with slabs of sinful Danish chocolate.



The view over Hunnebostrand and skerries (rocky isles). Much of the Scandinavian coastline comprises countless rocks and islands, which demand precise piloting and constant attention. The tightly packed houses painted in traditional ore-based Falu-red, their gables and windows picked out in white, lie huddled in little towns. (Left) The approach to Lake Viken from the Göta Canal. The lake is 300 feet above sea level and is peppered with rugged islands.

BALTIC CIRCLE

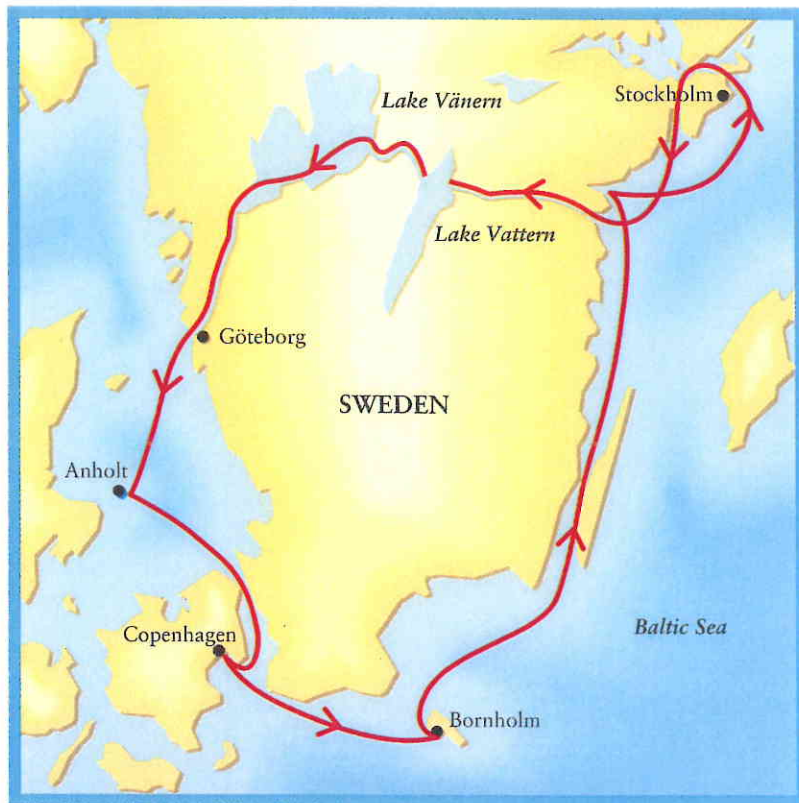
stands on an island separating the two. Baltic traders, schooners, square-riggers, steamers and historic boats of every size and shape line the wharves. On our first evening we took a dinner cruise on the steamer *Storskar*, celebrating her 125th year of service among the 24,000 islands of the Stockholm archipelago. Alex, our chief engineer and a rabid steam buff, immediately organized a visit to the engineroom where, amid a symphony of whirling shafts, con-rods, levers, cams and ratchets, we traveled back to an age when steam was king.

ALTHOUGH STOCKHOLM is a treasure trove of sights, we had to hustle south to our rendezvous with the Göta Canal—the vital link in our circumnavigation. Described as linking Stockholm to Göteborg, the actual entrance to the canal lies some distance to the south and to reach it we first had to cross the huge freshwater lake that stretches for more than 70 miles to the west of the city. It is home to some 10,000 islands. At Sodertalje, we returned to the Baltic to be confronted by a strong easterly wind and some of the roughest conditions of the entire trip. Seeking calmer waters, we plotted an intricate course between the skerries, sometimes stopping to check our bearings when the marks seemed to disagree with the chart.

The entrance to the Göta Canal lies at the head of Slatbaken inlet. Here we passed the single white tower of 13th-century Stegeborg castle mentioned by Hans Christian Andersen in his account of travels on the canal. Sixty thousand men labored for 22 years, using little more than wheelbarrows, gunpowder and wooden shovels to build this historic waterway.

All at once we found ourselves in a different world. Already, the boisterous sea seemed a lifetime away and all was peace and tranquility. The air was heavy with the scent of apple blossom and wildflowers; the copper hoops of the ubiquitous Swedish sundial glinted in the spring sunshine and a flock of puffy white clouds drifted lazily across an azure sky. We draped *Ozmaiden* in fenders and made ready for what was to become a familiar routine over the next few days, for Mem was but the first of 64 locks we had to transit before we would once again have salt water beneath our keel.

Once through Mem, we had the waterway to ourselves, gliding at a leisurely 5 knots through lush countryside. Bridges that opened unbidden on our approach only added to the





feeling of unreality, although we knew they were remotely operated by lock-keepers watching our progress on TV monitors.

By the end of the first day, we had risen more than 100 feet through 15 locks and passed through nine bascule, or rolling, bridges. We crossed lakes Asplangen and Roxen and used the deckwash pump to relieve *Ozmaiden* of her salty crust. The locks and bridges are closed to pleasure craft at 6 p.m., so we tied up for the night at the base of the Carl Johan flight of locks, whose seven water-filled chambers climb like a giant staircase into the side of the hill above us. In the evening calm, we watched the terns and grebes diving for fish in the still waters of Lake Roxen.

Sharp at 9 a.m. the next day, we entered the first of the inter-linked chambers and moved steadily from one to the other accompanied by a small German sailboat. The Berg series of locks comprises 15 in all with a total lift of 130 feet, so once through, we were already 239 feet above the sea. The lock-keeper told us that, even though they all looked the same, the water flow into each lock was quite different. The construction date was engraved into the coping stones on every lock and their sides were curved, bridge-like, to resist the inward pressure from the adjacent ground.



Our route around southern Sweden (top facing page). Talk about a rock and a hard place—you don't want to run aground off Sweden (middle facing page). The entrance to the Göta Canal is guarded by the single white tower of 13th-century Stegeborg castle, mentioned by Hans Christian Andersen in his account of travels on the canal. Transiting the Duvkullen Locks (above). Forsvik (left) was the first lock to be completed—around 1812. Its walls were slime-covered crags with fissures deep enough to swallow our biggest fenders.

BALTIC CIRCLE

We crossed Lake Boren at a smart clip and reached the five-lock flight at Borenschult where the lock-keeper raised us another 50 feet in 28 minutes. We tied up for the night right outside the old headquarters of the canal company in the town of Motala.

Much like a road connecting a series of towns, the Göta canal is an elaborate ditch built to link a string of existing lakes. One of these, Lake Vattern, is the fifth largest lake in Europe, and we stopped along its shore to visit the 16th century castle at Vadstena. We crept into the navigable moat and moored alongside the imposing castle walls while we went ashore to tour the interior. We rejoined the canal at Karlsborg and followed its tortuous course to Forsvik, which was the first lock to be completed—around 1812. Its walls were slime-covered crags with fissures deep enough to swallow our biggest fenders, so we had to keep them moving as the boat surged to and fro in the turbulence. The lock keeper told us that the canal was very narrow for the next few miles, but that we would be okay because, he confided, “You are all alone.” And alone we were and just as well since the narrow waterway, hacked and blasted through solid granite, wound its way between stands of pine trees brooding over their reflections in the mirrored waters.

Now 300 feet above sea level, we had reached our highest point and found ourselves in an empty landscape. The surrounding hills wore a somber mantle of conifers and Lake Viken looked unreal and magical under a skein of mist. The route twisted and turned between rugged little islands each with its own little tuft of trees. In places, remains of training walls and granite bollards used by the old sailing boats jutted from the shallow waters.

The country softened as we descended through picturesque locks surrounded by chestnut trees with their candlestick blossoms. This early in the season, traffic was still light and, depending on how far they had to go, the lock-keepers went from lock to lock by bike, motorcycle or car. It was late in the afternoon when we passed through the final Göta lock at Sjotorp situated on the eastern shore of Lake Vänern, the last and largest of the interconnected lakes. Like a vast inland sea with an area of 2,140 square miles and a width of 87 miles, the lake is billed as the third largest body of fresh water in Europe.

The following day we interrupted our crossing of the lake and moored in a small marina at the foot of Läckö Castle. We toured some of its 240 rooms before heading back to the boat and continuing our journey.

The dream of linking Lake Vänern to the coast had long exercised Swedish minds. But all early plans were thwarted by the Trollhattan falls, which formed a daunting

Cruising Guide

GETTING THERE Most domestic airlines that have international routes and foreign airlines service Sweden. Call your travel agent.

SOURCES FOR CHARTS You'll need charts for Norway, Denmark and Sweden if you want to duplicate this route. Norwegian charts: Statens Kartverk, Lerviksveien 36, POB 60, 4001 Stavanger, Norway; Danish charts: Kort-og Matrikkel Styrelsen, Rintemester Vej 8, DK-2400 Koebenhavn NV, Denmark; Swedish charts: Sjoefartsverkets Sjoekartsavdeling, S-60178 Norrkoeeping, Sweden. Charts for all of Scandinavia: Nautisk Forlag AS, Drammensveien 130, POB 321 Skoeyen, 0212 Oslo, Norway. **CANAL INFORMATION** The regulations that govern traffic in the Göta Canal is available from AB Göta Kanalbolag, Box 3, S-591 21 Motala, Sweden. The pamphlet *Information for Leisure Boats* has in it all you need to know to transit the canal.



In Gullholmen, meaning “Gold Island,” houses have their toes in the water. The town is said to be Sweden’s oldest fishing village.

barrier across the Göta River. These were first bypassed with a series of locks built in 1800 followed by an improved group in 1844—all laboriously blasted from solid granite with gunpowder. These old workings are still preserved alongside the four modern chambers which together change the level of the canal by 105 feet. Compared to those in Göta they are immense and reduced *Ozmaiden* to the size of a toy.

We met several ocean-going ships on their way upriver as we cruised downstream through the lush green countryside under cobalt skies. Slowly the rural scenes gave way to urban development; by afternoon we were in the middle of Göteborg surrounded by the bustle of a busy city.

The following day our track crossed that of our outward leg just 16 days earlier, and our circumnavigation was complete. We broke open the Aquavit and toasted the conclusion of another memorable cruise: 1,100 miles encompassing open sea, offshore islands, elegant cities, intricate coastlines, inland lakes, ancient castles and historic canals meandering through bucolic scenery miles from the sea. □