

# Discovering the FAROEES

A welcome waypoint on the way to Iceland.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY  
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TORSHAVN (opening spread and above) is the capital of the Faroe Islands. Our Fleming 65 stands out from the blue-water sailboats also bound for Iceland.

Before I eagerly accepted Tony Fleming's invitation to join him on his voyage from the Western Isles of Scotland to Iceland aboard his new Fleming 65, *Venture II*, I had never heard of the Faroe Islands (pronounced fer'ō). I discovered this island nation, halfway between Scotland and Iceland, to be one of the most enchanting, friendly and scenic places I have ever visited.

Fleming had begun another one of his voyages of personal discovery, this time a four-month, 5,000-mile round trip from Southampton, U.K., to Iceland. Having turned over the everyday tasks of building Fleming motoryachts to his younger management team, Fleming, who turned 75 this year, is doing what he preached all these years — realizing his dreams of visiting faraway places on a yacht designed for such adventures. Between 2005 and 2009, he embarked on a series of ambitious voyages on *Venture I*, the very first Fleming 65, including trips to Alaska, Sea of Cortez, Galapagos Islands, Panama Canal, St. Lawrence Seaway and Nova Scotia. Last year, Fleming completed a shakedown cruise of *Venture II*, cruising from Southampton to Hamburg and Dusseldorf, Germany.

I caught up with *Venture II* in Stornoway, Scotland, part of



TONY FLEMING, left, and Capt. Chris Conklin on watch.

the Outer Hebrides, aka the Western Isles. Docked along a floating pier meant for a local cruise ship, the Fleming 65 stood out from the crowd of commercial fishing boats, small powerboats and blue-water sailboats. A motoryacht of this size is uncommon in this part of the world, as most marinas are ill-equipped to provide sufficient dockage and electrical power. The vast majority of serious cruising continues to be done on oceangoing sailboats, a phenomenon not unnoticed by Fleming, who sees a growing opportunity for marketing his yachts in Europe.

Our plan was to head 250 miles northwest to the Faroes, where we would spend a few days exploring the islands before making the 400-mile passage to the Westman Islands, just off the coast of Iceland. From there, we planned to

make landfall in Reykjavik, Iceland's capital city. Fleming planned this trip before the eruption of Eyjafjallajokull (don't even try to pronounce it), the volcano that closed European airspace for several days this summer. Being able to see where this natural disaster occurred added an extra element of adventure to our already ambitious voyage.

*Venture II* is capable of cruising between 17 and 18 knots, but long-range passage making is typically done in the 9- to 10-knot range, where the total fuel burn is 10 gallons per hour. At that speed, it has a range of 1,500 nautical miles. We would be fully exposed to the North Atlantic once beyond the lee of Stornoway's Lewis Island, and the forecast called for 8- to 10-foot seas. While it has an inherently stable hull form, *Venture II's* active fin stabilizers would help make these snotty conditions quite tolerable. But just before we left the protection of Lewis Island, an alarm sounded indicating the cooling pump for the stabilizer's hydraulics was overheating. After anchoring off the beach, an inspection showed a failed pump impeller. Of all the hundreds of spare parts on board, an impeller for this one particular pump was not one of them. Apparently, something sucked into

the raw-water intake was there long enough to stop the flow and destroy the impeller. Thanks to the ingenuity of Capt. Chris Conklin, we were soon under way with a spare water distribution pump temporarily in place.

We gradually got into that special rhythm of making an offshore passage following a watch system of two hours on and six hours off for each of the four of us on board. Unless there is an emergency or extremely rough weather, life tends to slow down out on the ocean, and there seems to be more time for important things like reading, reflection and entertaining conversation. The seas eventually decreased to 3 feet, and with *Venture II* running smoothly and quietly at 9 knots, our 26-hour passage was pleasantly uneventful.

Arriving in Torshavn Harbor on the Faroese island of Streymoy, we were directed to tie up along a concrete wall in the middle of town across from a number of delightful pubs, cafes and small hotels. Torshavn is the nation's capital. Being a busy Sunday afternoon, we attracted a small crowd of curious onlookers who had never seen anything quite like a Fleming yacht. English is a second language to many Faroese, and it was easy conversing with these friendly folks. Fleming is a



THE VILLAGE of Gjogv sits above a 200-foot-deep gorge leading to the ocean. One of the local inhabitants checks us out during a hike (top).



**FAROESE** double-enders, seen here in Vestmanna, evolved from Viking ships. The Mykines ferry heads out through the narrow, rocky pass (below).

gracious ambassador-at-large, and he invited a number of local boating enthusiasts on board for a tour of his yacht.

Covering an area of 70 miles long by 75 miles wide, the Faroes have a population of less than 50,000 with 19,000 being in the Torshavn area. An intricate network of roads, undersea tunnels and one bridge connect most of the islands, with small ferries connecting the rest. Fishing is the main industry, followed by woolen products, but tourism seems to be where the growth is. We rented a car and spent five days exploring these fascinating islands.

Among our first impressions was the cost of everything. Being part of the Kingdom of Denmark but not a member of the European Union, currency is Danish kroner. While guidebooks warn of high prices, it was a bit disconcerting to pay \$10 for a beer and \$20 for a sandwich. But considering the weakness of the U.S. dollar and that everything has to be shipped there, we quickly adapted and accepted reality.

The high number of small powerboats — mostly double-enders with sweeping sheers, lapstrake hulls and small doghouses — undoubtedly connect the Faroese to their Viking ancestry. While private cars and public transportation are common, many islanders continue to travel by sea, using their boats for recreation or commercial fishing. Almost every island has at least one well-protected little harbor filled with these boats. Other islands have large commercial harbors, the largest being Klaksvik on the northern island of Bordoy. If we hadn't had a schedule



to keep, we would have cruised these islands, stopping in Klaksvik before heading to Iceland. Instead, we saw as much as we could by car and ferry.

Locals recommended the village of Gjogv on Eysturoy as a must-see, as it exemplifies the country's small, picturesque communities by the sea. Driving the narrow, winding roads precariously close to vertical drops of hundreds of feet was an adventure, as was transiting tunnels that were sometimes only one car wide. Like much of the Faroes, Gjogv was a mixture of the old and new, with turf-roofed homes standing next to contemporary structures and modern, center-console skiffs sharing dock space with traditional, wooden double-enders.

In search of the magical Atlantic puffin, we took a small ferry from Vagar to the mysterious island of Mykines, made even more mysterious by the ominous weather that day. After a wet and rough one-hour ride, we entered a short, narrow passage between menacing rocks on one side and a vertical wall of rock on the other. We could almost reach out and touch the rocky cliff as the captain suddenly spun a 180, pointing the bow into the ocean surge as he came alongside a concrete landing. With the ferry's engine running and in gear, we timed our jump onto the wet concrete pier and climbed 200 feet up a steep path to an overlook, where we could see how challenging the landing is. We later learned the ferry occasionally turns back, unable to land when the surge is too great. During winter, the only way to reach the island is by helicopter.

With a year-round population of less than 20 hardy souls, Mykines is a tourist attraction for hikers and bird lovers. Unfortunately, the weather this June day was so windy, cold and wet, our hike up the mountain to see the puffins was cut short. We returned to the tiny village, taking refuge in the church to wait five hours for the next ferry to arrive.

A visit to any new land is enhanced greatly by getting to know its inhabitants

and experiencing different cultures, so our visit to the Faroes was made much more memorable by our meeting of Zacharias Hammer in the village of Norodepil. As I was kneeling in a field of flowers composing a photograph of the village church, a large, strapping man approached me. After I explained I am a boating journalist, he invited me to his home to share a bowl of "Viking soup" his wife had just made. Hammer is a documentary filmmaker and was on his way to Greenland to shoot a television program. By now Fleming, who is also an avid filmmaker, had arrived. While the two discussed cameras and editing software, I enjoyed Mrs. Hammer's Viking soup, made with lamb and fish.



Hammer and his wife are just two examples of the warm hospitality we experienced during our one-week stay in the Faroes. Returning to *Venture II* that afternoon, we began our preparation for our 400-mile offshore passage to Iceland. These fascinating, faraway islands are now on my list of places to return to, even if I have to resort to more conventional means of transportation. I wouldn't be surprised, however, if Fleming decides to take *Venture II* back to the Faroes for some inter-island cruising. If so, I hereby volunteer as crew. ❖



**FAROESE FILMMAKER** Zacharias Hammer serves Viking soup (top) in his hometown of Norodepil on the island of Bordoy (above).