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THE TRAWLER & OCEAN MOTORBOAT MAGAZINE


*Cruising To
The Arctic
Circle On A
Fleming 55*





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To The Arctic
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photography
by the author*



Lofoten:

Islands Under

the Midnight Sun

IT IS HARD TO FIND WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE STUNNING beauty of the Norwegian coast. The scale is so great, the vistas so magnificent and the panoramas too sweeping. It seems an impertinence even to try to confine it with mere words or to contain it within the rectangles of a handful of photographs.

Of nowhere is this truer than for the Lofoten group of islands which hang down, like a bunch of grapes, from the coast just north of the Arctic Circle.

There were five of us aboard *Ozmaiden*, a Fleming 55, now in her 10th season with 20,000 miles of high latitude cruising beneath her keel. Egil Paulsen, owner and skipper, was ably assisted on this trip by professional yacht captain, Duncan Cowie, who had brought the boat north from her winter quarters in Sweden.

Navigation was a shared responsibility, but Erling Strom, who had served in the Norwegian Navy on the lookout for Russian submarines at the time of the Cold War, was the person most familiar with these treacherous waters.

We had come together from as far away as Australia, Singapore, Taiwan, and England to join *Ozmaiden* on a cruise to the Lofoten islands—which had been high on our list of dream destinations for several years.

Heading North To Norway

On a previous trip, our most northerly point had been the pleasant town of Aalesund, situated 300 miles south of the Arctic Circle. It was here that we joined the ship for our trip north.

The weather wasted no time in establishing who was in charge of our schedule, and a Force 11 gale kept us in port an extra day. Although frustrated by the delay, we were happy to be safe and secure at a snug berth in the center of town.

The following morning, with an optimistic forecast, and under marginally improved conditions, we headed out

Fiske har vært næringsgrunnet i Lofoten i

through the breakwater and into storm-tossed seas.

We headed north and sought the shelter of the labyrinthine waterways, characteristic of the Norwegian coastline, with the wind still strong enough to drive water upward, in defiance of gravity, from a so-called waterfall.

Over the next few days, we threaded our way up the coast through an intricate maze of channels between islands, holmes, skerries and rocks. Whenever possible, we anchored each evening in secure, almost-landlocked fjords, surrounded by steep wooded hillsides, the tranquillity was disturbed only by the rush of water tumbling over rocks from melting snow and, much to our frustration, the patter of rain.

But even the rain had its compensation when we were rewarded one evening by a magnificent double rainbow. We anchored where its base kissed the water, in the hope of snagging a pot of gold.

The Land Of Midnight Sun

The boundary of Arctic Circle is marked by a metal sculpture of the globe on the tiny island of Vikingen, and our GPS confirmed our latitude of 66 degrees, 33 minutes North. We were just three days short of the summer solstice, and, for the remainder of our trip, the sun never sank below the horizon.

We were now farther north than Iceland, at the same latitude as Greenland, Baffin Island, and northern Alaska. But, the moderating effect of the Gulf Stream, kept major ports—even well north of our location—ice-free throughout the endless nights of the Arctic winter.

The town of Bodo was our jumping off point for the Lofoten Islands. We made the six-hour crossing over the Vestfjord in lumpy seas, and it was not until we were quite close to them that the islands rose like gray wraiths from the mist and light rain.

We passed Skomvaer Fyr, the lighthouse standing sentinel over the scatter of rocks to the south of the archipelago, and headed for Rost, the outermost and most remote of the islands.

Fish and fishing have been the lifeblood of Lofoten for more than 1,000 years. The Norwegian Arctic Cod breed in the Vestfjord to the east of the islands, then migrate some 500 miles north to the Barents Sea—the frigid body of open ocean that lies between the north coast of Norway and the Polar icecap. The Barents Sea was the site of the recent Russian submarine tragedy.

Seven years after their migration, the cod return to the place of their birth where predators, in the form of fishermen and killer whales, lie in wait and catch them in enormous quantities. Much of the cod is allowed to dry naturally in the wind on racks, under the generic name of stockfish.

The pungent smell of very dead fish assailed our nostrils long before we saw the drying racks erected on the rocks at the entrance to the harbor.

In these parts, they call it the smell of money. The fishing season runs from January to April, in the deepest months of winter, when for weeks the sun never rises above the horizon. At those times, the harbors become so packed with boats from around the country, they say you can walk from one side to the other without getting your feet wet.

Not surprisingly, the potential for territorial disputes is limitless, and extends back in time since fishing began. These days, special fisheries police control the situation, and now orange markers on the side of the mountains delineate the boundaries.

Wild Territory

Just south of Moskenes island, rising sheer from the sea at Lofoten Head, is the Maelstrom, a ferocious tide rip so infamous that its name has become part of the English language. Edgar Allan Poe and Jules Verne both wrote of the Maelstrom: described as “the current that howls, that rumbles like a buffalo herd on the prairie, that drags ships under—smashing them to smithereens against the seabed!” Hmmm.

This seemed like a phenomenon



over 1000 år .



Reine has the reputation for being the most beautiful place in Norway (top). The lifeblood of Lofoten (left), drying naturally on racks in Reine. Traditional turf roofs (above) sprout a riot of wild flowers. We joined the ship in Aalesund (far left), *Ozmaiden* moored under tree in center of photo.

The Maelstrom is a riptide so infamous that

best viewed from dry land, so we decided to keep our distance, exercising the same caution we had used when passing the similar Coryvrekkan whirlpool in Scotland's Inner Hebrides years before. The closest settlement to the Maelstrom is the abandoned village of Hell, which perhaps tells us something of life there!

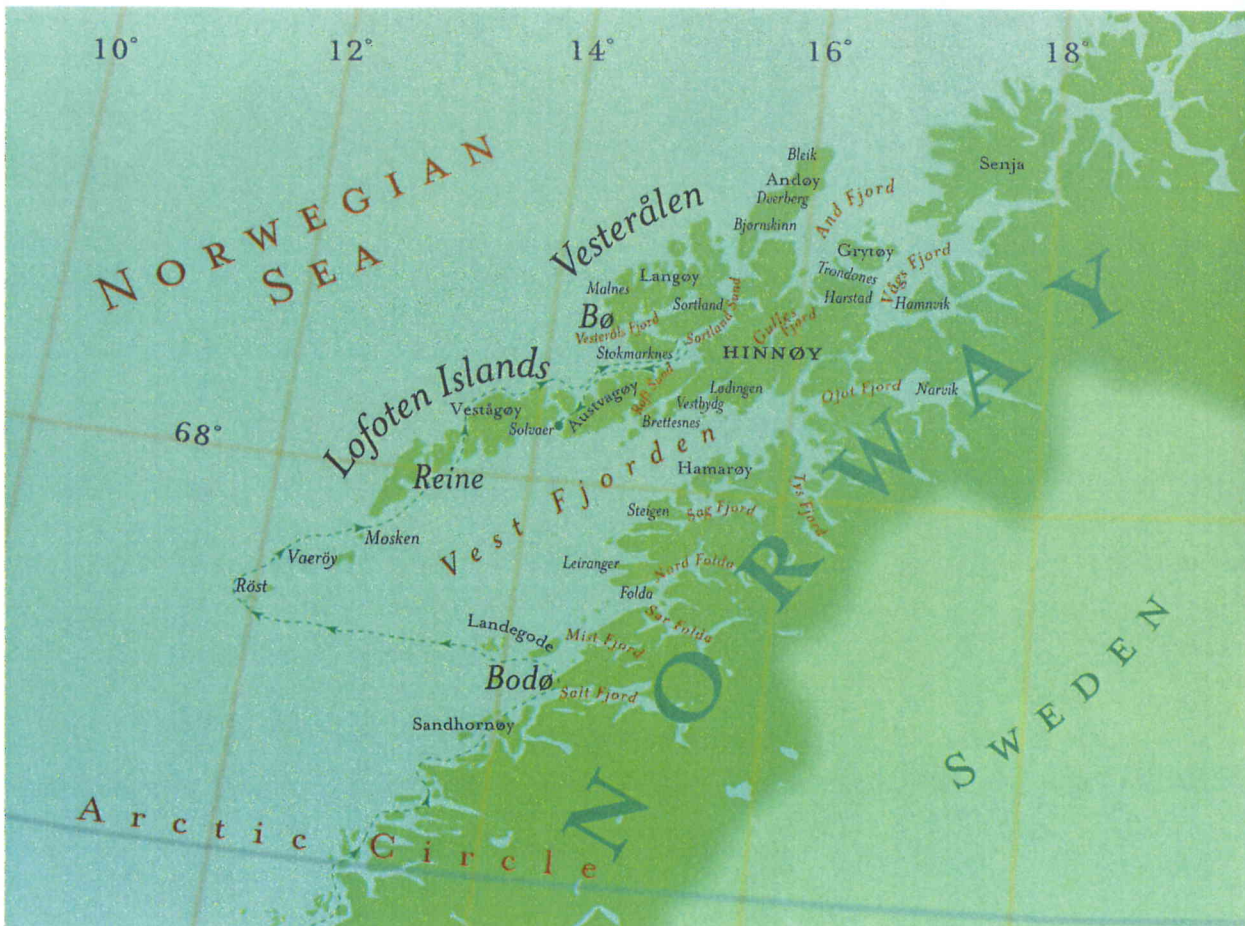
Reine, on the island of Moskenes, has the reputation for being the most beautiful place in the whole of Norway. Considering the stiff competition, this is an impressive achievement. As real evidence of potential destructive gales, the small lighthouse guarding the entrance to the harbor is anchored in place by steel cables. We noticed, too, that all trash cans are similarly tethered.

We moored alongside a small jetty, next to a noisy colony of gulls in nests built on the sloping roofs of rickety huts perched on pilings. The gulls must have their own brand of superglue to prevent their nests being swept off into the water whenever it rains...which it does a lot.

Shortly after our arrival, the low-lying clouds, which had been our unwelcome companions for the past few days, slowly dissipated to reveal the reasons for Reine's well-deserved reputation. Ramparts of solid rock, most still carrying their burden of winter snow, towered over the town on three sides. The lower slopes, green as any emerald, provided a precarious foothold for tiny



Erling Strom on foredeck of Ozmaiden (above) in Forsfjord.



Edgar Allan Poe has written of it.

Ramparts of solid rock (left), tower over Reine on three sides. Kirke Fjord (below) behind the town of Reine from *Ozmaiden* foredeck.



Om natten så vi sola gå ned i Norskehavet.

dwellings and farms nestling beneath the crags. Some of the houses had the traditional turf roofs which, at this time of year, sprouted a riot of wild flowers.

We dined ashore that evening at the nearby Gammelbua Restaurant. Its menu listed reindeer, halibut, whale meat, and local lamb—which is voted the best in the world. The waitress told us that the restaurant was only open from June to September, and there were no other restaurants open for local residents during the long winter months.

The following morning we cruised Kirke Fjord, which lies behind the town and which almost bisects the island of Moskenes. In the side channel of Forsfjord there is a waterfall, fed by melting snow, which cascades hundreds of feet down sheer rocks into the still, jade-green water. At three-and-a-half billion years of age, the rocks here are some of the oldest in the world, with peaks so high that some managed to keep their heads above the ice during the last ice age.

I buzzed ashore in the dinghy and photographed *Ozmaiden* reduced to an insignificant speck by the breathtaking surroundings.

Midnight Madness

It was now June 21st and we wanted to see the midnight sun on the longest day of 2000, so we made our way to the western (and more exposed) side of the island chain. We passed through Sundstraumen, the narrow channel dividing Moskenes from the adjacent island of Flakstad. For once we were lucky with the weather, as that night we watched the sun slowly sink from a cloudless sky toward the Norwegian Sea. Then, when just a handbreadth above the horizon, the sun changed its mind and started to rise once again.

Over successive days, we cruised gently north through a magic panorama made even more unreal by the perpetual daylight. Tiny houses, dwarfed by a landscape created for giants, nestle at the foot of massive monoliths of rock, seemingly thrust by titanic forces from the very bowels of Mother Earth.

We passed tiny islands, each a perfect jewel. Bonsai islands, Duncan called them, which was a perfect description for a tumble of natural rock, covered by a profusion of mosses, ferns, and multicolored lichens, with stunted silver

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birch and mountain ash clinging to precarious footholds in crevices between the boulders. Puffins skimmed with urgent wing beats over the surface of a sea that resembled dimpled glass.

In the high mountains, soft pillows of clouds hung in layers along the slopes, and gauzy tendrils of mist drifted amongst the jagged peaks. Occasional shafts of sunlight pierced the clouds to spotlight features in this monochrome scene—perhaps a group of houses or, on one occasion, an isolated church.

A Rugged Lifestyle

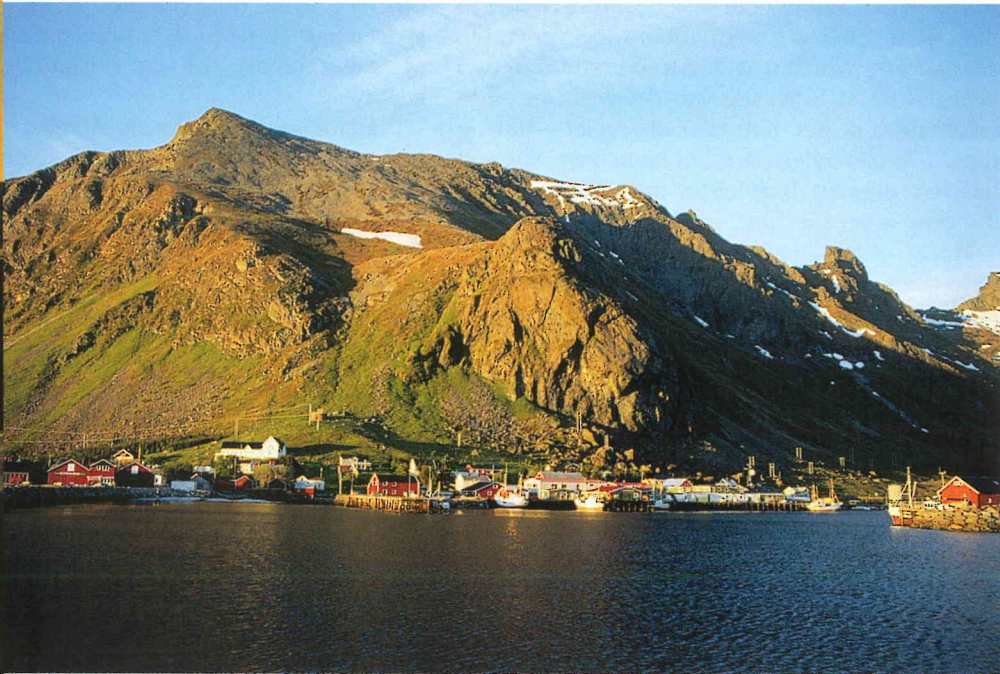
In Stokmarknes we paid a visit to a museum dedicated to the *Hurtigruten* (the Coastal Express), which has been the lifeline of this coast for more than 100 years. It is hard to imagine what life must have been like for the inhabitants of these remote regions in the days before the service was established.

Even today the railway does not extend north of Bodo, and the Coastal Express provides a

Midnight sun at its lowest point in the sky on June 21st (above).

Town of Ramberg (top, right) at midnight.

Ozmaiden moored alongside the docks in Nusfjord (right) with fishing boats.



Auskjed med Bofoten

vital daily service for both people and goods headed in both directions, regardless of the weather or time of year.

The museum has a retired ship, the *FinnMarken*, hauled out of the water parallel to the shore. Later we went aboard the venerable *Havald Jarl*, which was due to be retired in two years. Built in 1959, she was dressed overall in celebration of her 40th year of service—having run 2,728,000 miles since her launching! She still has her original Burmeister and Wain engine, the only one of its kind still in service.

These older vessels are being replaced by new ones, and a one-week cruise between Bergen, in the south, and Kirkenes, close to the Russian border, must rate high on anyone's list of desirable journeys.

On June 25th, we reached our maximum northern-most position of 68 degrees, 37.039 minutes, and reluctantly turned our bow south. Having come so far it seemed a pity not to continue to North Cape or even to Spitzbergen, but the tyrannies of personal schedules made that an impossible dream.

Our Way South

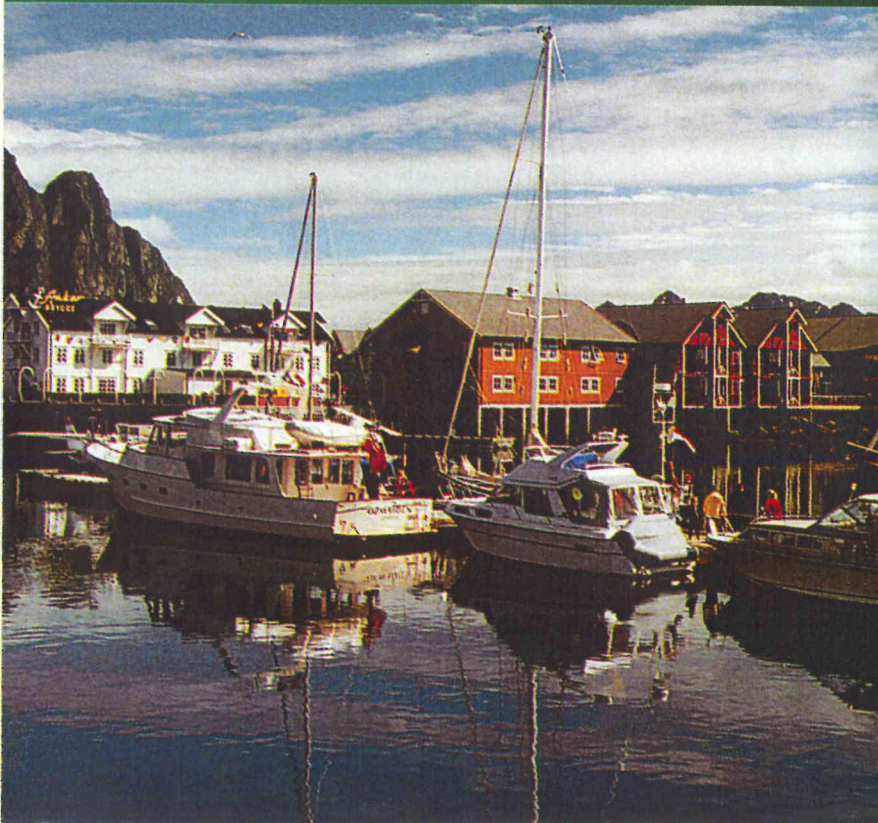
Our way was barred by a seemingly impenetrable wall of snow-capped

mountains, which filled the entire horizon. It was here that we sought out the hidden entrance into the Raft Sundet, which separates the islands of Austvaagoey and Hinnoya. An offshoot from this channel is the short, but spectacular Troll Fjord, famous even in this land of superlatives, for its outstanding natural beauty.

Cliffs of solid rock, rising straight up from the water, define the narrow entrance, and the inner end of the fjord opens into a small bay surrounded by snow-capped peaks.



The many faces of Norway; sweeping panoramas, bustling docks, mystic fjords, and snow-capped mountains, all seem so unreal, almost magical. You just have to see them for yourself.



In March, 1890, a confrontation took place here between fishermen using traditional boats and men using the newly-introduced steam boats who had blockaded the fjord. On that occasion, the traditionalists prevailed and established their rights to continue to fish as they had before.

Ozmaiden still had more than 1,000 miles of cruising before reaching her homeport near Oslo, but our visit to Lofoten came to a close at Solvaer, which, although not large, is the administrative center for the islands.

We found a berth right in the center of town. It felt quite strange, after 700 miles of relative isolation, to be surrounded by the bustle of human activity. A seaplane continually buzzed us, taking sightseers for half-hour trips around the area.

At the entrance to the harbor stands a statue of a woman atop a lofty pillar, with one arm extended in greeting or farewell. For us it was a symbol of farewell to Lofoten.

We watched her slowly sink below the horizon as we headed over calm seas toward the misty, snow-capped mountains that ringed the horizon. They all seemed so unreal, almost magical, but words fail me.

You just have to see them for yourself. ●

Farvel!

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Magazine, Inc.
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Sources of information for cruising the Lofoten Islands:

Norwegian Cruising Guide (From the Swedish Sound to the Russian Border)

ISBN 0-7136-4115-0

by John Armitage and Mark Brackenbury
published by Adlard Coles Nautical
35 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4JH

Ferie & Fritids-Havner. 336 Guest and Natural Harbours.

ISBN 82-90653-13-1

by Gunnar Steen Iversen

Published by Nortrabooks, and issued by Redningsselskapet (The Norwegian rescue organization equivalent to the Royal Lifeboat Association), and Statens Kartverk Sjøkartverket (Norwegian charting authority)

Buy it in any bookstore or chart agent

Den Norske Los 5

by Rorvik - Lodingen Og Andenes.

Unlike the rest of this series, which covers the whole Norwegian coast, this section is currently only available in the Norwegian language. But it is an excellent book with maps and colored aerial photos of harbors, plus lots of other information.

Charts

Charts #31 (Aalesund) to #75, inclusive
Also detailed charts of Bodo (#476) and Solvaer (#462). Overall Planning Chart is #302 and quite helpful.

Charts can be obtained from chart agents in main ports in Norway, or ordered from Kelvin Hughes in the UK:

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New North Road
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