

NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS

*A Fleming 55 motoryacht takes
an adventurous crew on a 1,400-mile cruise from the
lochs of Scotland to the fjords of Norway.*

Story and Photos by TONY FLEMING







Northern exposure: Ozmaiden passing Urquart Castle on Scotland's Loch Ness (opening spread); the yacht in Norway's Aurlands Fjord (above).

The call was from Egil Paulsen, the Norwegian owner of the Fleming 55 motoryacht *Ozmaiden*: "This year we plan to cruise from the west coast of Scotland up to the Shetland Islands and across the North Sea to the fjords of Norway. Crew same as last year. Can you make it?"

Of course there can be only one answer to a question like that, even if it takes reorganization on a cosmic scale to make the arrangements. And so it was that before long five of us convened from far and wide for what promised to be the trip of a lifetime—a 1,400-mile cruise across the top of the world—in a boat designed for just such a voyage.

Crewmembers were assigned their roles as follows: Angus, an Aussie, as Chief Cook; Alex, an engine designer from England (via South Africa), as Chief Engineer; Torkild, a Dane who'd been cruising the Scottish isles for three years, as Chief Navigator; and myself, as Chief Builder of the Fleming—a handy hostage in case something went horribly or expensively wrong.

Spirits were high as we passed the marina breakwater and headed out from Inverkip, near Glasgow, into the still waters of the Firth of Clyde, once the birthplace of many great ships, including the *Queen Mary* and the ill-fated *Titanic*. Thoughts of the tragedy gave way to com-

edy as Torkild then pointed out the hotel said to be the inspiration for the zany British TV show "Fawlty Towers." Ahead of us the Isle of Arran lay hidden behind a curtain of pearly mist borne by the light southerly breeze. Around here they say, "If you can see Arran, it's about to rain; if you can't, it's *already* raining."

We turned north, and by midday were grappling with the first of the 19 hand-operated, do-it-yourself locks on the Crinan Canal. Our flabby bodies, unaccustomed to the rigors of manual labor, protested as we struggled with the cranky cranks and heaved on the long beams to close the massive timber gates. Some tourists asked us where we were going.



Lock to lock: Going through the Fort Augustus locks on the way to Loch Ness (above).



Norwegian beauty: Exploring lovely Naeroy Fjord (above); a marina in the little town of Risør on the Skagerrak, an arm of the North Sea (below).

“Norway,” we replied, scarcely able to believe it ourselves.

After mooring for the night, we cleared the final lock, then threaded our way through a scattering of islands overlooked by Duntrune Castle, inhabited since the 12th century. An eight-century leap then led us past “Barnhill,” the isolated shore-side house on the island of Jura where George Orwell wrote his novel *1984*.

As we approached the Gulf of Corryreckan between Jura and Scarba Islands, its innocent appearance at half-tide belied the almanac’s dire warning of tidal currents over eight knots and violent turbulence periodically culminating in “The Hag,” a roaring whirlpool that wells up to



a height of several meters. "I think not," said Egil as he avoided the temptation to take a closer look at this unique spectacle and spun the wheel to point our bow the other way, up the Sound of Luig. Even there we could feel the thrust of the powerful current against our keel under the smooth surface.

At noon we stopped at Oban harbor, which was bustling with arriving and departing ferries, and left *Ozmaiden* moored alongside the tug *Whiskey Warrior* while we went ashore to stock up. Then we proceeded on past a row of ruined castles along the Sound of Mull to Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, where we spent our sec-

ond night anchored out in the bay to stay clear of the multitude of crabbers and fishing boats that unload their catches at the town pier at all hours. We buzzed ashore in the rubber dinghy to see the town, which surrounds the harbor with pastel houses that climb up the steep hillside in tiers like theater patrons jockeying for a better view.

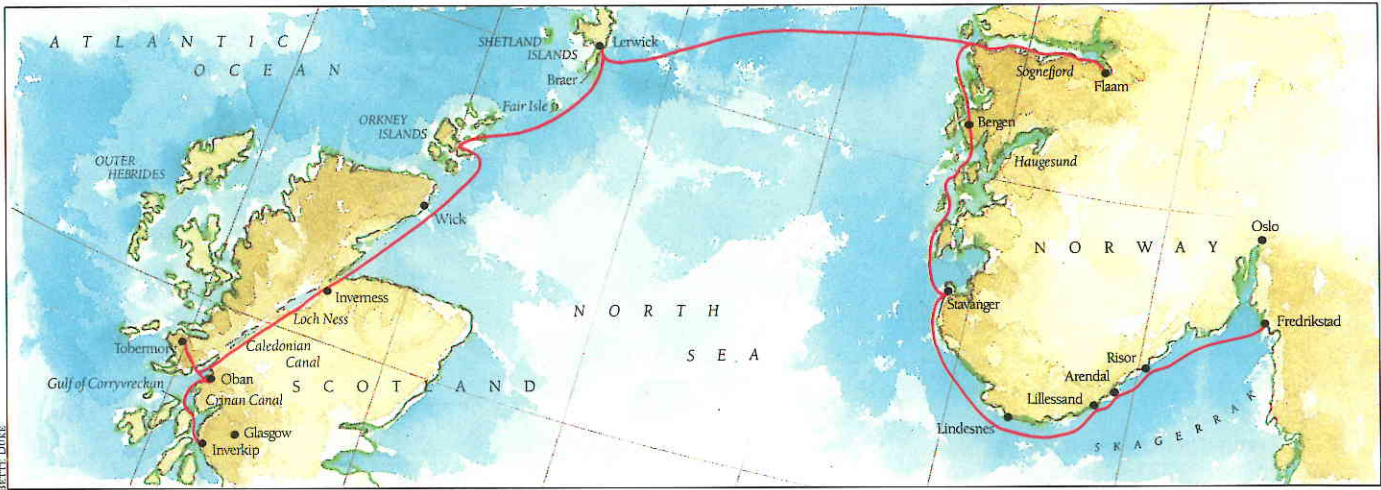
The next morning a bridal veil of mist masked the town and made ghostly forms of the other boats. So perfect was the stillness, we scarcely dared breathe. Using *Ozmaiden's* radar, we moved cautiously back out into the Sound of Mull, until a fresh wind tore the mist to tatters and

swept it out into the gray Atlantic.

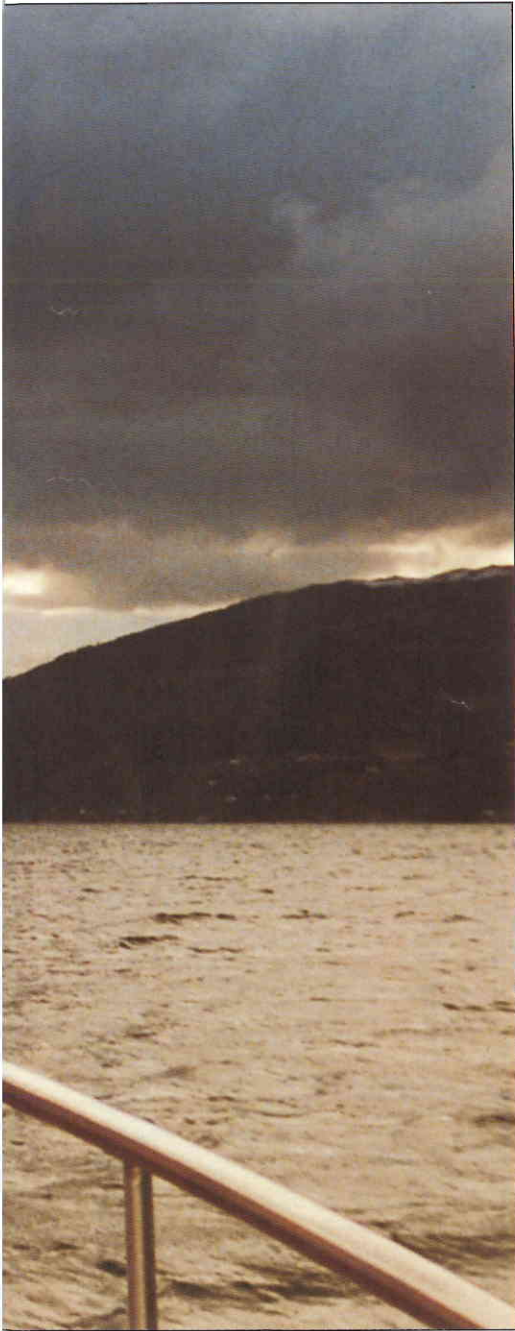
We were soon heading northeast up Loch Linnhe towards the Caledonian Canal, which connects Scotland's west and east coasts, slicing through the very heart of the Highlands. Britain's tallest mountain, Ben Nevis, in a mantle of summer snow, loomed high over the entrance to the sea lock at Corpach, and the bay was frosted with whitecaps tossed up by winds now gusting to 30 knots. Once through the lock, we negotiated Neptune's Staircase, an impressive flight of eight locks, just before it closed for the night.

Over the next couple of days, as we traversed the width





BERRY DIXON



Harbor-hopping: Going ashore in Tobermory (above); dinghy docks in Nevlunghavn (below).



Midnight sunset: The Sognefjord, which extends deep into the heart of Norway, at sundown (left).

FLEMING 55 PILOTHOUSE MOTORYACHT

of Scotland along the Great Glen, we negotiated 29 locks and crossed four lochs (lakes). Near the end of the chain, a series of locks at Fort Augustus led to Loch Ness, where we kept our eyes peeled for a sighting of the elusive monster supposedly lurking in its 1,000-foot depths, but to no avail. One sight we did see on the forested slopes of the deep-blue lake was Urquart Castle, fought over by Robert the Bruce in the 13th century.

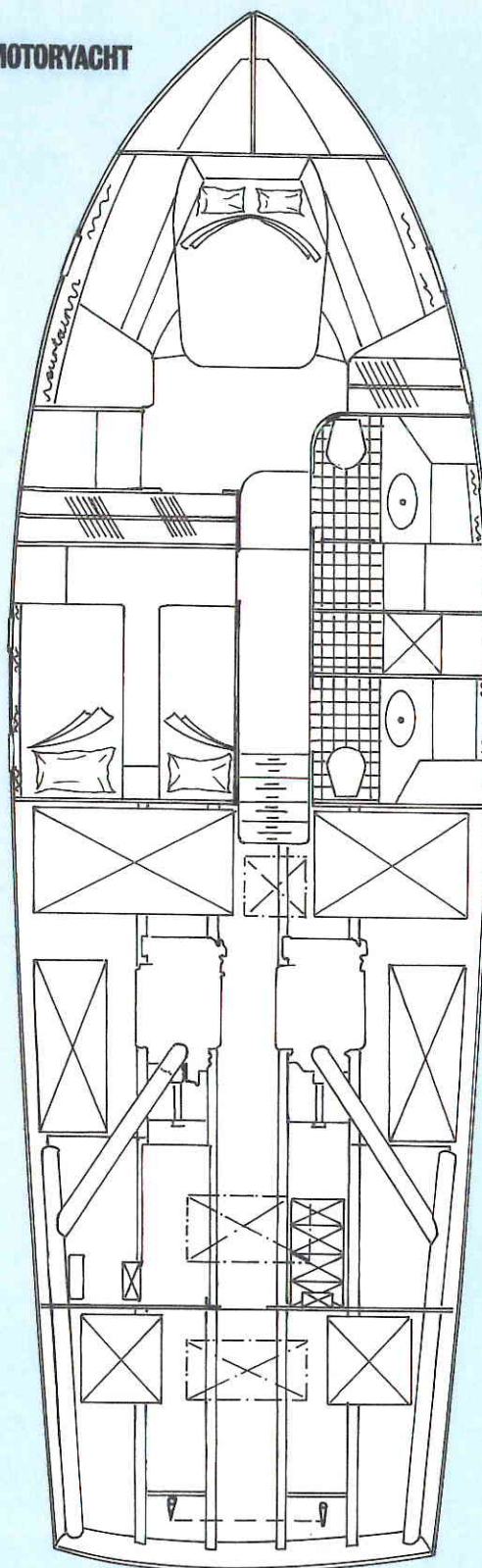
The next day, we passed out through the east coast sea lock near Inverness into the Moray Firth. With salt water once again beneath our keel, we headed out of the Firth into the unprotected waters of the North Sea, escorted by a school of porpoises—surely a good portent. The strong winds of the last few days had died, leaving as their only legacy a confused and lumpy sea. Slowly the ramparts of Scotland's northern tip dropped astern, while the low-lying Orkney Islands climbed over the horizon ahead.

Swooping birds

By the time we headed up Shapinsay Sound into Kirkwall on Orkney Island, it was past midnight. Despite the late hour, a couple of policemen sauntered by. "Just being nosy," one said. "Yon's a fine wee boat. Lucky ye didna' come last week. We had fog as thick as porridge movin' sideways a' 40 miles an hour." In the morning we took a quick tour of the windswept, emerald island, marveling at the remains of the 5,000-year-old underground dwellings of Scara Brae, said to be northern Europe's best-preserved prehistoric village.

That afternoon we continued north, moving easily over diminished swells under a sky overcast with pillowy squall lines. Occasional shafts of sunlight pierced the clouds, turning the sea to silver. Ahead of us the lone outpost of Fair Isle climbed slowly out of the sea, gradually revealing the houses of its 69 inhabitants, while towering cliffs dwarfed a few hardy fishermen riding the swells in their open cockleshell boats. The scarcity of people stood in contrast to the abundance of wildlife as all at once the air around us filled with birds—fulmars, guillemots, arctic terns, gulls, puffins, and huge gannets with dazzling-white six-foot wings. Curious seals popped their heads out to watch.

That night we docked in Lerwick on Shetland Island, where we visited the site where the tanker *Braer* had



LOA	55'9"	Power	(2) 375-hp 3208 TA
Beam	16'		Caterpillars
Draft	5'	Price	\$670,300
Displ.	66,000 lbs.	Fleming Yachts, Dept. MB&S, 510 31st	
Water	300 gals.	Street, Suite H, Newport Beach, CA 92663.	
Fuel	1,000 gals.	(714) 723-4225.	

been wrecked in a fierce winter gale six months earlier. In the now-placid spot, only her bows were still visible above the surface where she'd ridden the huge Atlantic rollers to her destruction on the jagged rocks.

From Lerwick we headed out into the North Sea toward the coast of Norway some 200 hundred miles away, and set the engine rpm to 1900 for a comfortable cruising speed of 10 knots over lolling gray seas. As darkness fell, the pilothouse became a world of its own in the green glow from the plotter and radar screens. The sound from the twin 375-hp Caterpillars was no more than a reassuring heartbeat, quieter even than the rush of water past the hull. The only intrusion was the appetizing aroma of the dinner Angus was busy preparing in the galley.

We had entered waypoints for a course that took us south of the greatest concentration of oil rigs, but as the day began to dawn, their advance guard appeared on the horizon like aliens from H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. The GPS and autopilot kept us perfectly on track in the following sea, though we had to dodge a few trawlers and a freighter.

Cascading waterfalls

It was 9 a.m. when we caught our first glimpse of Norway's countless low-lying islets and skerries (rocky isles) through lacy curtains of cloud. Lighthouses and other markers along the coast of Norway are crucial for navigating its hazardous rock-strewn waters. Our landfall was at Holmengraa, meaning gray rock. This was no place for mistakes, and we carefully checked our exact position before entering the Sognefjord, Norway's largest fjord.

The deeper we penetrated the fjord, which extends more than 100 miles into the heart of the country, the higher and more brooding the surrounding mountains became. The water beneath our keel was an incredible 4,225 feet deep, with peaks almost that high rising skyward from the surface. As we passed, chunks of rock broke free from a craggy cliff and plummeted into the depths in a shower of spray.

Tiny towns huddled for shelter beneath towering mountains, while diminutive farms, with pocket-sized hay meadows, clung to any precarious corner sufficiently level to permit cultivation. Everywhere waterfalls cascaded down the precipitous crags, fed by the melting snow, which became ever more

abundant as we got deeper into the interior. In these surroundings it was easy to believe in the trolls of Norwegian folklore, said to be so huge that pine trees grew from their noses.

Donning sweaters and heavy jackets, we stood on the flying bridge marveling at the grandeur all around us, with the music of Grieg thundering from the speakers. We branched off into Aurlands Fjord and followed it to its very end, where we found a berth in the small town of Flaam.

Over the next few days we explored many of the other spectacular fjords that branch off from the Sognefjord. Wonder piled upon wonder, until we ran out of superlatives to describe the breathtaking scenery. One evening, as we headed west towards a range of jagged snow-capped peaks lit by the rays of the setting sun, a fierce wind with gusts as high as 38 knots kicked up, so we turned into Ese Fjord and anchored in the sheltering lee of the mountains, where the only sounds were the waterfalls tumbling down the sheer slopes. The next morning I scrambled up a steep, wildflower-studded meadow, from which *Ozmaiden*, far below, looked like a toy boat.

Back to civilization

In Fjaerlands Fjord, at the base of the glacier Jostedalbreen, we reached our maximum northern point of 61 degrees, 25 minutes—about the same latitude as Anchorage, Alaska. Though the sun sank briefly below the horizon each night, it stayed light enough to read a newspaper in the cockpit until well after midnight, before retiring to our comfortable quarters below.

Our fjord tour now complete, we headed back toward the sea under a cloudless sky. In the evening, a golden light cast a glow over the peaceful seascape as we anchored in a small bay behind the charming little town of Gulen. The next day we headed south along the coast to Bergen, where we moored alongside the wharf in the center of the city. After spending time in the wilderness it was a strange feeling to find ourselves once again surrounded by the conveniences and drawbacks of civilization, but we enjoyed the restaurants and markets for a couple of days before taking the boat the last 450 miles to Egil's home near Fredrikstad south of Oslo.

Without a chart you could be lost forever in the maze of channels that lie to the south of Bergen. Open

stretches of water lead nowhere, while the correct route follows hidden channels that wind their way among tiny skerries and jewels of islands so close they almost brushed the hull. At every turn were exquisite little houses set in picturesque spots or beside small beaches with boats tied alongside jetties. The next two days demanded full concentration as we navigated the tortuous channels.

South of Stavanger we had to head back out to the open sea. A northerly gale was forecast for our area, so we increased engine rpm to 2300 to get ahead of the weather and began surfing down the fronts of the big waves at speeds up to 17 knots. With her long, deep keel, extending well below the props and rudders, the Fleming ran straight as an arrow and provided an exhilarating ride. Rain squalls began to build up over the land and, as the day wore on, they headed out to sea and we began to feel their effect. But we made good time, and in the early afternoon rounded the southern tip of Norway, marked by Lindesnes, a legendary headland notorious for its many shipwrecks and the subject of many poems and sagas. From here our course turned north once more, up the Skagerrak, a big arm of the North Sea, where we flew over the subsiding waves.

Kaleidoscope of scenes

The last two days of our cruise were a kaleidoscope of islands, pine trees, skerries, winding channels and delightful little towns: Lillesand, where the harbor was bustling with parties of people celebrating midsummer in their traditional double-ended *snekkes*; Lingor, named the best-preserved village in Europe, where the main street is water; Risør, with two marinas and myriad jellyfish; and Nevlunghavn, a little harbor jammed with dinghies. Finally, we crossed the Skagerrak at the entrance to the Oslo Fjord and tied up at Egil's jetty by his house near Fredrikstad.

Once we had washed off all the salt, *Ozmaiden* was gleaming once again. It seemed inconceivable that in just 17 days she had brought us in safety and comfort almost 1,400 miles through lochs, canals, open seas and fjords from the west coast of Scotland to this quiet Norwegian backwater. Egil made the final entries in the log: 162 hours under way on our trip; 5,340 total cruising miles to date overall for *Ozmaiden*.

"Now," he said as he drew the final line, "where shall we go next year?"