

To the Arctic circle in Umiak

The yacht: Bestenwind 50

Built in Holland for long distance cruising in high latitudes

The owners: Mike and Pam Jaques

The crew: Mike and Pam, Les, Diane

Monday 8th June Bergen

I arrived in Bergen via Manchester airport late at night and boarded the local bus which was there to meet the flight. Pam and Mike were there to meet me at the fish harbour and took me to Umiak which was moored right next to the statue of Larsen of Shetland Bus fame. He worked with the Norwegian resistance in WW2 and made in all 52 trips between Norway and Shetland in horrendous conditions and under warfare.

Tuesday 9th June Bergen

This was to be a day of rest in Bergen as by complete coincidence Mark Knopfler was due to perform that evening so we were all enthusiastic not to miss this event and Les had managed to get tickets for us all. A chilly start to the day but after stocking up with fresh groceries and fish from the amazing market the weather warmed up and Pam and I set off to ascend to the viewpoint above the city. This can be gained by funicular railway but there was such a long queue that we decided to benefit by the exercise and walk. Quite a stiff climb but well worth it for the view of the harbour with Umiak as a tiny dot and the training ship Statsfjord Lemcool clearly visible. There was no queue for the descent and we were swiftly back at the boat for our well earned lunch of fresh prawns.



From the viewpoint



The Statsfjord Lemcool

We spent the afternoon browsing the Hanseatic shops and warehouses of Bryggen where there are craft shops, silversmiths, chandleries and the most amazing shop selling skins and furs of all sorts of arctic creatures. See the photos below.



The fur shop



Bryggen

We were all so excited to see the famous MK perform but unfortunately came away underwhelmed - the evening was cold, the sound system not good and the performance just average.

Wednesday 10th June 76nm to Haerland

The next morning we were off before 0900 hours with a light SW'ly following breeze no more than Force 4 and occasional sunshine but also wet and drizzly spells with low visibility. We managed to sail some of the time but it was mainly motoring as we navigated the inner passages around small islands and outlying rocks. Although some of the channels were narrow they were well marked and our navigation aids were spot on. Mike was navigating using the onboard chart plotter with a separate navpod on deck and also an independent computer system. Pam was in charge of destinations and her navionics on the i-pad was invaluable for detailed information of positions of pontoons and local services. The Imray pilot for the Norwegian coast gave useful information on the myriad of places to visit. Finally we had the charts and travelled through one most days - hilarious as each chart was mostly sea with a tiny strip of Norway on the right hand side! Sailing Umiak is so easy with an abundance of electric winches, furling headsail, single line reefing and lazyjacks for mainsail handling - no struggling to flake a heavy mainsail as it came down so quickly flaking itself onto the boom cradle in a few seconds. The pilot house is a dry and comfortable place to sit and read or watch the world go by - no need for everybody to sit in the cockpit and get wet! - and then a couple of easy steps down into the saloon so that it doesn't seem like you are climbing ladders to get about the boat.

Just after 1700hrs we arrived at Haerland on the island of Atloy where there is a small village with a visitors pontoon with water and electricity and an honesty box to pay the dues - 250nok which is about £20. We had a short stroll around the village but there was little sign of life on such a damp day. Later on, as we cooked dinner, a Norwegian Bavaria (Coulant) tied up behind us but we didn't make contact with the crew until the next port of call.

Thursday 11th June 41nm to Maloy

Next day we left the mooring at 0940 with a forecast for a light SW'ly increasing as the day progressed. The weather was slightly gloomy but we negotiated some interesting passages past Stabben lighthouse near the city of Flores. The scenery was less remote than the previous day and we passed by holiday homes, farms and fish farms in the Norwegian typical style. The wind increased and was more directly behind as we approached the fjord leading to the notorious 900m high rock walls of Hornelen at the headland of Bremangerland. This headland is known as the squallmaker. An overtaking coaster converged with our course just as we were observing a sea eagle forcing us to gybe (unusually bad seamanship) and then there were several more gybes as we sailed into the fjord with the wind funneling from behind. Eventually we were coming to the end of the fjord and needed to turn to port but there were no lulls so we decided to tack around and then Mike decided to put in another reef and just as we were doing this there was an almighty bang and the vang came away from the mast. By this time the wind was gusting up to 40 knots, directly behind and varying in direction by 40 degrees, no doubt because of the high cliffs which would have been spectacular if we could have seen them! Not an easy few minutes but we soon were back in control and ready to drop the main and motor into Maloy. We tied up in persistent rain at about 1600hrs, put the heating on and dried out for the rest of the day.



In Norway they build very substantial lighthouses! The one above is Stabben light near Flores and on the right is one just north of Brekstad



Friday 12th June Maloy

The weather was so wet and windy that we stayed put and spent the day shopping, doing the laundry and cooking. In the laundry block we met the crew of Coulant from the previous port and they gave us some useful information about the ports further north and in particular about the next stretch, Statt headland, which is exposed to westerly winds and charted as having dangerous waves.

Saturday 13th June 115nm to Kristiansund

We left Maloy at 0500 hours to negotiate Statt headland and had a good passage in a light northerly breeze. The waves were disproportionately large for the wind strength but after we passed by Runde island which is a bird sanctuary that Les had once visited and there was an abundance of bird life - we had noticed the absence of sea birds in the previous days. Then we were back amongst the rocky isles and skerries heading for Alesund where the wind dropped and the sun came out. Just north of Alesund and heading through a narrow buoyed channel we came across the local regatta with yachts trying to race against the current - more yachts than we had seen for days.

Then north of Alesund we were exposed to the open sea again as we negotiated Hustadvika - inshore is the famous Atlantic Ocean Road which links Kristiansund to Molde via a series of bridges and tunnels using small islands. About 5 miles long it is apparently one of the most dangerous and spectacular drives in the world. Finally we arrived in Kristiansund after 15 hours at sea at 1930 hours.



Sunday 14th June 55nm to Kongsvoll

After a short walk around Kristiansund in the early morning sunshine we cast off at 0930 with a forecast of W/SW force 4 and had a good sail with some sunshine and views of the

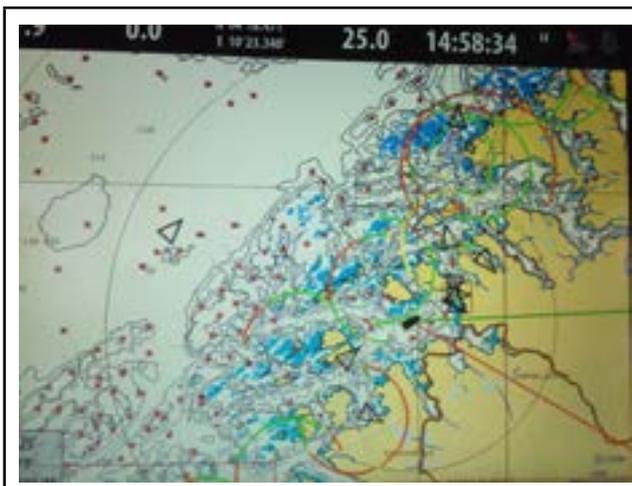
mountains of Smola. Pam wanted to have a restful day and a nice port to visit so we chose the tiny village of Kongsvoll with its campsite thinking that there would be some action there. We had to take a detour around an uncharted fish farm before entering a very narrow channel which led to a completely sheltered bay but then as we attempted to find a place on the inner pontoon the weather changed for the worse and became wet and squally. It turned out that there was not enough depth for us and we had to go to the outer pontoon. All tied up by 1830 and Pam tried to fish with little success. The weather turned very Scottish and continued to be damp and misty so we cooked and then had an early night.

Monday 15th June 12nm to Brekstad

There was still little sign of life but the showers at the campsite were open and Les and I availed ourselves of that luxury. Then we filled up with diesel at a self service pump and paid our mooring fee into the honesty box. Mike was worried about the kicking strap that he had rigged up in Maloy after the vang broke. The blocks that he had fitted had not been strong enough and had failed so he wanted to buy something more substantial and with a deteriorating weather forecast he wanted to move on to Brekstad which is more of a port and has a ferry service to Trondheim. So we had a rather wet and windy sail across the fjord arriving in Brekstad at about 1500. Mike managed to get some rather substantial steel blocks probably designed for fishing boats and we all had a walk ashore in this rather austere town. On the way back we were invited to have an aquavit with some rather jolly Norwegians who had just arrived in their small but well equipped yacht. Arne, Mona and Igor told us about the Norwegian rescue service which costs about 100 euros per year - they had used the service when they had not been able to recover their anchor and although they had to spend a day waiting they had provided a diver to recover the anchor.

Tuesday 16th June 100nm to Rorvik

Still windy but we left Brekstad at 0930 following a narrow channel north. The forecast was for SW force 4 to 6 and we did have a couple of heavy squalls of 25 knots coming through as we left the distinctive red lighthouse from the earlier photo to port and then the wind came onto the beam. The scenery was spectacular as we threaded our way through narrow channels with occasional glimpses of the Hurtigrute which takes tourists from Bergen to Tromso over 11 days. A trip for some future date. It was another long day lost amongst the skerries before we tied up at Rorvik about 2230 next to another Dutch Bestenwind - Stayer. The occupants, Mika and Doue, were good fun and they came aboard for a few drinks whilst we cooked a meal. Still daylight at 1am! We were to see much more of them over the next few days as we made our way into the Arctic Circle.



Lost in the skerries south of Rorvik

Wednesday 17th June 70nm to Tjotta

We slipped away from the mooring at 0940 without even stepping ashore as our new found friends also wanted an early start. So with a Swedish yacht ahead and Stayer behind we motored into a light northerly breeze. It was pleasant to feel some warm sunshine on our faces for a change but the breeze was cool. It was an interesting route between rocks and islets requiring accurate pilotage. At one point our passage was blocked by an uncharted fish farm and just as Pam was turning the boat around a sea-eagle flew directly overhead. We motored all day in a flat sea passing typical Norwegian farms and villages, the island of Leka being particularly attractive. Inland to the east and north the scenery became more rugged and the mountains were snow capped. Then we proceeded to the correct position to see the hole through Torghatten mountain - a spectacular sight to see the sky through this 160m deep by 35m by 20m natural cleft through a mountain. We continued to motor passing under the 30m bridge at Bronnoysund and finally mooring up at Tjotta at about 1830. We had amazing views of the snowy eastern slopes of the 7 sisters (more about them later) and were made very welcome by the locals. There was a yacht club with great showers and a laundry that we could use and the pontoon facilities were very good as usual with water and electricity included for a minimal price of 150 nok posted into the honesty box as usual - about £13. Before I had my shower I poked my nose into the common room and the members were making waffles and immediately invited me to partake. There was a small shop for provisions and a regular ferry service to the mainland. It was our first evening of warm sunshine.

		
<p>Village scenery on the island of Leka</p>	<p>Torghatten mountain</p>	<p>Bronnoysund bridge</p>

Thursday 18th June 52nm to Selsoyvik

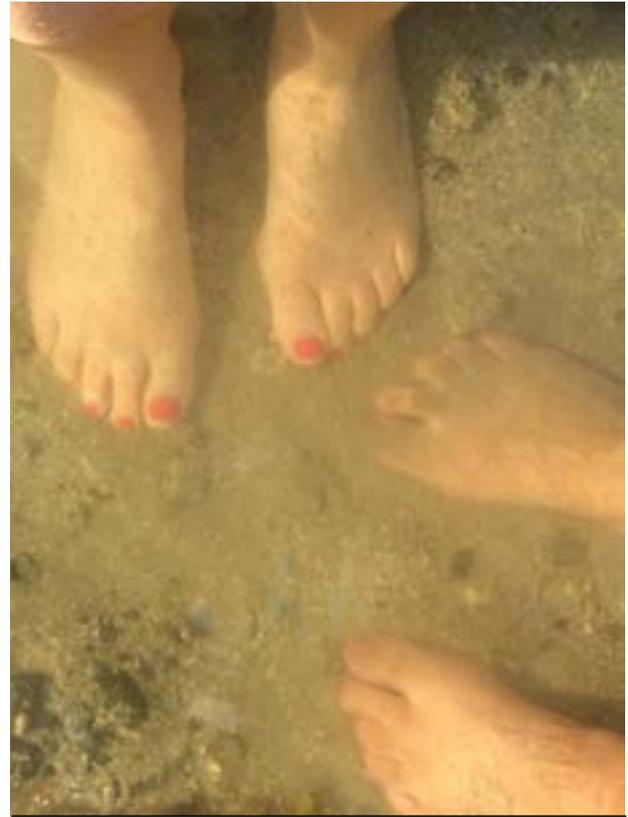
We left this delightful place at 0930 after a leisurely breakfast with even lighter northerly breezes forecast. We ghosted past the spectacular range of mountain peaks known as the seven sisters from the west this time. Norwegian folklore relates a story of how the seven unmarried sisters escaped from home and were pursued by a troll from the Lofoten islands - there was such a commotion that Lekamoya ran home to Leka, Hestmannen shot an arrow south through Torghatten mountain causing the hole and everybody, including the seven sisters who had danced naked in the waterfalls, was turned to stone because they had forgotten the golden rule to hide before the sun rises. Methinks that would not be easy in midsummer when the sun does not set!

We crossed into the Arctic Circle at 1715 and celebrated with white wine - however it turns out that we celebrated a little prematurely as we thought the position was 66deg 30min and in fact it is at 66deg 33min so a few miles later we passed the Arctic Circle monument on a rocky islet below.

	
<p>The Arctic circle monument</p>	<p>The ferry landing</p>



Umiak at Selsoyvik



Arctic toes

We managed to sail a little and then motored on to Selsoyvik, a former trading station dating back to the 1700's with a very substantial concrete pontoon with all the usual facilities that we had come to expect. We were tied up by 1820. There were views of the strange peak on neighbouring Hestmona but despite there being a few cars ashore there seemed to be nobody about. Whilst Mike and Les cooked curry Pam and I went for a stroll and had a little paddle - the water was cool but no more so than it would be in Blyth. Then suddenly a ferry approached bearing locals who jumped ashore with shopping bags before the ferry departed as quickly as it had arrived. Several people came over to chat and admire the boat and then who should arrive but our Dutch friends on Stayer. It was their turn to entertain so the evening passed quickly with the help of lots of red wine! Actually it never got dark.

Friday 19th June 29nm to Engen

We cast off at 0740 and were beating northwards past the island of Renga in a force 4 by 8am and then into Holandfjord on a reach. It was sunny but cool and we arrived at the head of the fjord, Engen, by midday. The pontoon there was not in good shape but the weather was settled and we were on a mission to visit the Svartisen glacier. There was the usual honesty box and bikes for hire if you didn't want to hike the 4km to the glacier. We all wanted the exercise so we set off to walk at about 2pm and enjoyed the warm sunshine as we skirted past a herd of white cattle making their way back to the farm at Engen for milking. It took 4 hours to do a circumnavigation of the glacial lake and walk up to the glacier. The geology was amazing and the alpine plants very colourful and Mike chipped off some glacial ice for our gin and tonics. This was very clear, unlike ice cubes from the

freezer which are opaque, but disappointingly was not fizzy as expected. Maybe that only happens in the Antarctic! As we were descending who should appear above us - Mika and Doue from Stayer again! Back at the boat there was more company with an English yacht and another Dutch yacht as well as Stayer. We had a quiet evening - Pam caught a small fish and the boys repaired a batten and a winch.



Umiak at Engen



Walking to the glacier



The strange geology beneath the glacier



Svartisen glacier

Saturday 20th June 56nm to Bodo

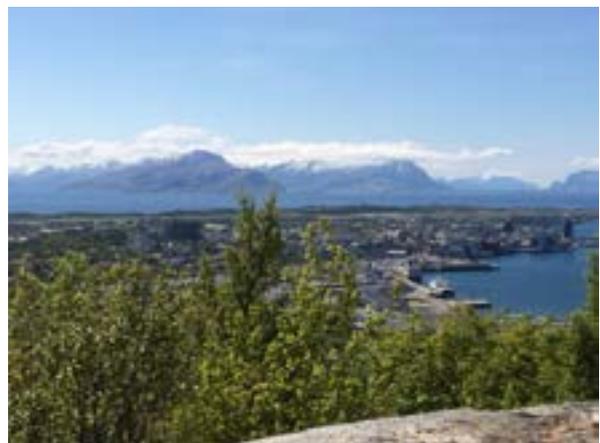
We left Engen at 0540 trying not to disturb the other boats as we had to get to Bodo to meet the next crew. The wind was a light northerly again and it was cooler so we had to motor. Another few hours of spectacular scenery and we saw sea-eagles again. By 1240 we were tied up in Bodo and soon after Ian, Colin and Giles turned up. Bodo is a sophisticated city of some 50,000 inhabitants with shops, supermarkets and hotels and an airport. The afternoon soon passed as we stowed away more gear, Giles went up the mast and we stocked up the boat with fresh provisions. I cooked my legendary tagine and then we all squeezed in for a rather restless night.

Sunday 21st June Bodo

After a quick breakfast I got off the boat said my goodbyes and reluctantly made my way to the hotel I had booked the previous day. This was a small family run hotel and they let me check in early so I left my bags and wandered northwards past the ferry terminals towards a small range of hills where the radio mast is situated. The road climbed past some attractive houses and then at the top there is a recreational area for hikers with quite a lot of people around. I could see Umiak as a tiny speck moving northwards towards the snowy peaks of the Lofoten Islands and felt a little wistful - something to do in the future - but soon cheered up as people were friendly and engaged in conversation with me. I cut the walk short and returned to the city for a bite of lunch and a beer - the first time since Bergen that I had eaten out. I was supposed to be on an exciting rib trip at 4pm to see the whirlpools at Saltstraumen but got talking to somebody and I was a little later arriving for the trip than intended and although I was still 15 minutes early it had already departed. Feeling disgruntled I marched to the tourist office and got the money back - apparently the boy should have put my name on the list - and I was lent a bike for free. So I had a couple of hours riding the coastal path on the south side of Bodo past the Nordland open air museum. This midsummer day in Bodo was warm and sunny and for 24 hours! When I returned to the hotel other guests were making waffles so I did the same and got chatting again and then it was still warm and sunny at 10:30 pm as I sat by the harbour eating my supper of fish soup. I had intended to see the sun dip in the north before rising again but would not have got a good view and was too tired anyway.



Looking north to the Lofoton islands



Looking south to Bodo



Sea-eagle sculpture



My attempt at a waffle



Fish soup

Monday 22nd June

It was an early morning start and a shortish walk to the airport to catch my flight home via Oslo. Once in the air we flew over the snowy wilderness of northern Norway for about half an hour and it made me realise that fishing, farming and tourism can only take place along the coastal regions of this wild and unspoilt country.



The Crew: Mike, Pam, Les and I

Reflection

I can recommend Norway as a destination for cruising yachts and would love to go back and spend much more time in the area I travelled. We did in total 606 nm but as the boat was at the start of a serious expedition to Spitzbergen deadlines had to be kept and we did not have time to stop and visit some of the places of special interest. The cruising area is vast and facilities for yachtsmen are second to none and minimally priced but eating and drinking out is rather expensive. People are more and more friendly as you go northwards. Many thanks to Mike and Pam for including me on this amazing trip.

