

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 10, 2014

A Trip to the North Cape, 1990: I have always liked the long days of summer, and several times in my life I've traveled far to the north in search of the midnight sun. In 1988, Ruth and I went to Alaska in early July, but our northernmost point was just south of the Arctic Circle (66+ degrees north latitude) near Fairbanks. We did see nights where there were scarcely two hours of darkness, and we walked the streets of Whitehorse, capital of the Yukon Territory, in daylight at 11:30 p.m. However, our trip to the FAR NORTH occurred two years later.

In 1990, also in July, we flew to the United Kingdom, cleared customs at Heathrow (London), and connected on a flight to Edinburgh, Scotland. Settling in at the Caledonian Hotel, we enjoyed afternoon tea while looking out at the Edinburgh Castle high above us. Two days later, we took the train to Oxenholme, gateway to the English Lake District, and rented a car from an agency in Kendal. We stayed three nights at the Miller-Howe House overlooking beautiful Lake Windermere, visited William Wordsworth's home at Grassmere, and the home of Beatrix Potter (Peter Rabbit, etc.) across the lake. During an afternoon lake cruise on a steam launch, we were served afternoon tea heated on its boiler and sailed past a huge flying boat that was supposed to fly to the U.S. the next day. Our car rental was interesting. We never saw anyone from the rental agency. We picked up the car at the railway station and got its key from the station agent, and we did the reverse when we turned it in. I recall only one close call when we approached a large tour bus coming the opposite direction on a one-lane road. I attempted to reverse to a wide place where the bus could pass but forgot about going toward the ditch on the left instead of the right. It didn't make a difference to the bus driver; without hesitating, he went past at a fair rate of speed as if he were in America.

We took the train across the north of England from Carlisle to Newcastle-on-Tyne and then a cab for the last 10 miles to Tynemouth, where we boarded a North Sea ferry named the *Norway*. It resembled a small cruise ship, and we had good accommodations and a nice dinner as we passed a North Sea oil-drilling platform en-route to Bergen, Norway. Our plan was to spend a day in Bergen before boarding a small Norwegian coastal steamer for the six-day trip to Norway's North Cape and on to Kirkenes just east of it.

The fleet of 14 small commercial vessels that operates along the Norwegian coast allows for daily service from Bergen for the 12-day round-trip. Our vessel turned out to be one of the oldest and smallest in the fleet. Its accommodations were less than comfortable. We had a tiny inside cabin with a shower that discharged on the floor of the bathroom (as was true in our hotel in Bergen). There were 30 ports-of-call in each direction, which averaged 5 per day (and night), some of which were at 2:00 or 3:00 A.M., as it was light at all hours. Sometimes, they would be docked for three hours; other times it would be only 5 minutes. The little boat carried a lot of young day passengers who filled the lounges with their luggage and bicycles, so often there was no place to sit except on our bed. The weather was cool and cloudy during the third week of July 1990. The most memorable ports were Trondheim, the early capital of Norway; Tromsø, the world's largest city and home of the only university north of the Arctic Circle; and Hammerfest, at nearly 71 degrees latitude, a town I had wanted to see since school days. We did have time to get off the ship and explore in these places. Before reaching Tromsø, we had three ports-of-call in the Lofoten Islands, the sun came out, and several vacationers followed our ship on water skis as we had a smorgasbord on the open deck at 11:30 P.M. A Russian cruise ship was docked at Hammerfest, and we were invited to go aboard. Although it was modern in all respects, we were thankful we were not among its passengers. The organist on our little ship was from Hammerfest.

Norway's North Cape is on an island. We docked on the inward side of this island and had a 15-mile bus trip to the Cape itself. The temperature was in the mid-50s with cloudy skies. The island is full of reindeer in the summer who swim across from the mainland for grazing in July and August. A Laplander who ran a tourist trap on the island offered to come aboard our little vessel and prepare reindeer stew for dinner. It tasted like beef stroganoff; it was delicious. A new tourism center and museum had been built into the solid rock that comprised the North Cape. They said it was visited by 100,000 tourists annually. At Kirkenes, about two more ports to the east and ten miles from the Russian border, we left our little coastal steamer, and flew back to Oslo. We hadn't seen the midnight sun, but we saw two nights with no darkness.

Norwegians are very friendly, and they like Americans. I liked them, not only because of that, but also because it reminded me of our country in the 1930s. I had my fill of herring, however. When I was frisked at the Oslo Airport and had to partially undress as the stainless steel in my back set off an alarm, it was all in good fun, and the inspectors and I enjoyed a good laugh.