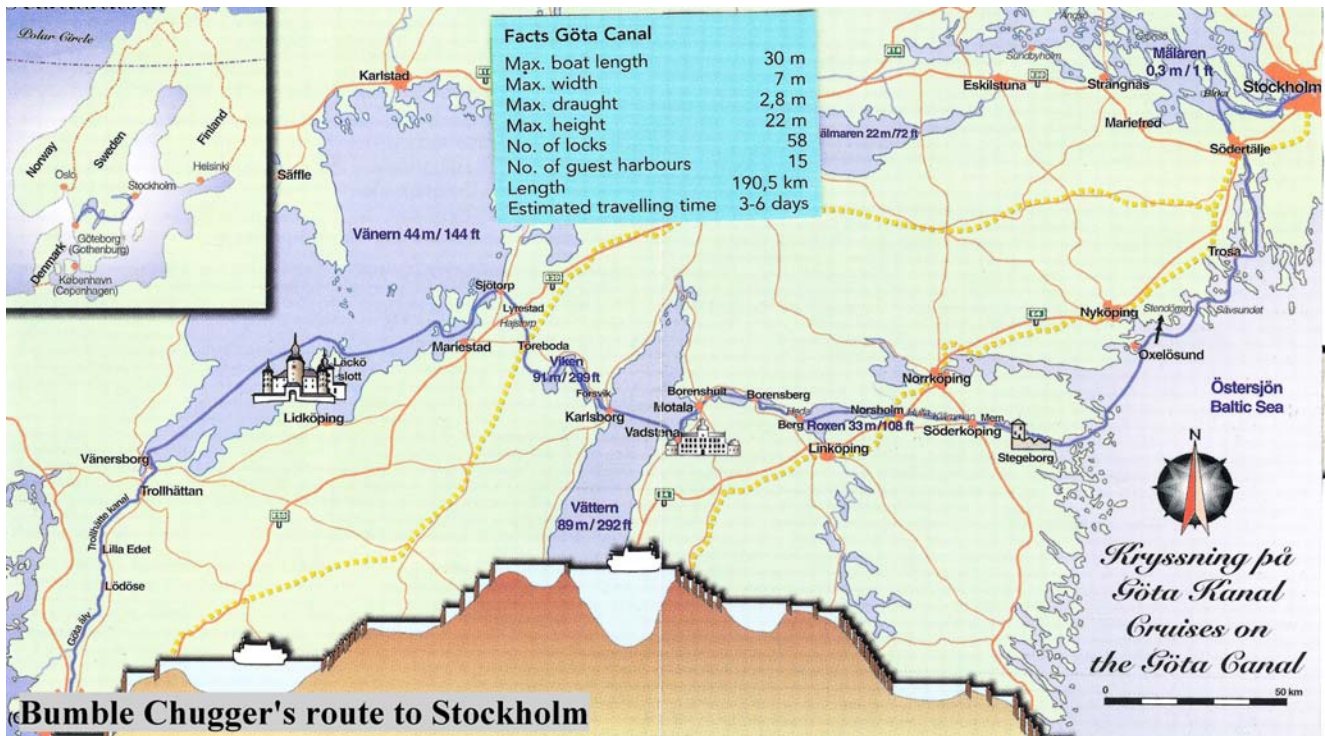


**Swedish holiday in a Cornish Shrimper**  
**16 May to 20 June, 2002.**  
**Robin and Gillie Whittle (Bumble Chugger: 124)**

**Part 2: Trollhättan to Stockholm via the Lakes and Göta Canal**



Waking up to our first morning afloat at Åkerssjø we realised that the glorious weather that we had had on the land journey was at an end. There had been quite a downpour in the night and although not raining as we got up it was dull and overcast. As we were enjoying our breakfast in the cabin we noticed a large cargo vessel passing through the lock and steaming on towards Trollhättan. It must have been several thousand tons displacement and a close fit in the lock. It made us feel pretty insignificant and gave us a sharp realisation about who has right-of-way!

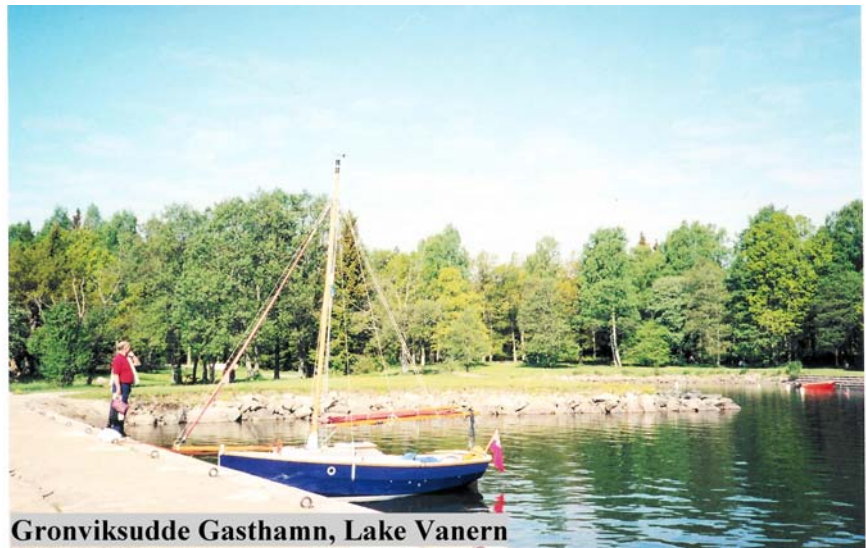


Soon after this we set off under motor. We took great care to read all the instructions concerning the traffic lights on the banks of the canal. These appeared at bridges and where the canal narrowed. The method of ensuring open bridges was a little baffling. The first bridge started to open as we approached. We could see no one in control and assumed that there must be some closed television monitoring system. We arrived at the second one, a large railway bridge, at about midday which stubbornly remained closed. We had no idea what to do and decided to have an early lunch. While we were moored to the approach quay a large yacht, named Heureka, drew up behind us. The lady in the bows asked us (in English) if we had called up the operator and then said it did not matter as she

had telephoned in advance. Almost immediately the opening sequence started and the massive bridge deck started lift up. We followed them through much relieved. All the other bridges and the one lock taking us through Vänersborg into Lake Vänern opened as we approached.



We arrived at Lake Vänern as evening approached and found a charming little marina at Grönviksudde near the south corner of the lake. There were three boats moored up to one of the groins and we joined them. The method of mooring boats in Sweden is different from that in England. Usually there is a row of buoys set about 20 metres from the quay/pontoon. Visitors are expected to attach a stern line to one of these as the boat moves ahead on towards the quay. It was a bit traumatic for us with such a short boat. Our stern line was not long enough to have a double length, so in the space of two or three seconds as we passed the buoy I had to thread the end of the stern rope through the buoy loop and tie a slip knot. I could then let go of the end and rely on just the single length of rope. I completed this task just in time to hold the boat from ramming the quay.

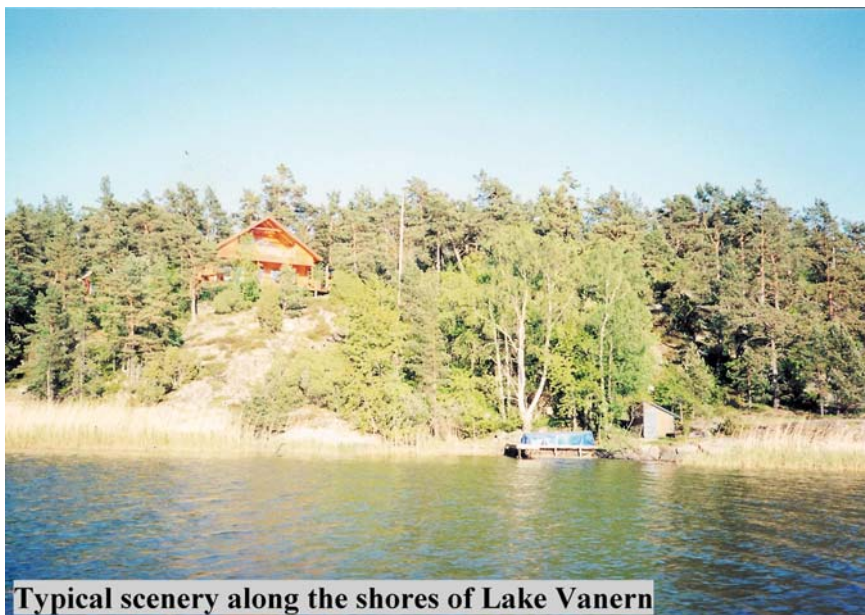


**Grönviksudde Gasthamn, Lake Vänern**

We had not realised the significance of sailing in Sweden out of season. The time with our companions was short lived as they all set sail back to Vänersborg within half an hour of our arrival. They had just been out for a day's picnic. We were left in what seemed an idyllic spot, all to ourselves. Throughout our trip we found very few manned Swedish yachts. The main season starts on Midsummer's day. It seemed very odd to us as, even in the second half of May, the conditions were as good as a typical English summer. We later discovered that it had been an untypical Swedish summer, one of the hottest for many years.

The next day started warm and sunny with a light NE breeze. This grew to a 4/5 in the afternoon and backed to the north. After enjoying a hot shower at the campsite attached to the marina we set off under sail. Lake Vänern is a vast fresh water lake 65 miles north/south and 45 east/west. At first a fine fetch seemed to be reasonable but after two hours we were not making much progress and the more the wind backed the more we pointed in the wrong direction. Then the wind began to increase and get colder. By now we were out of sight of the southern shore. The waves started to get quite choppy and we realised we needed to use the engine to have any chance of reaching Sjörtorp, the start of the Göta Canal, within the planned two days. So we motor sailed with the wind against us. In addition, instead of sailing round to the north of Kållandsö, we decided to take a short cut through the middle by way of a channel which was shown on the charts as navigable for small craft. There was a road bridge about half way through at a place called Skansen and we hoped it would either be high enough to sail under

or be some sort of lifting bridge. We arrived at the entrance to the channel, which was marked by a small rocky island, "Måken", at 5.30pm. Finding this island and then picking up all the channel marks through the network of small lakes and connecting passages was a pleasant change from the rather long, dull and wet sail in the open lake. There were woodlands and rocks right down to the waters edge and every now and then we saw a summerhouse half hidden in the trees. These were typically a reddish brown or yellow ochre colour. We discovered later that the red was a copper oxide paint that could be bought quite cheaply throughout Sweden.



Typical scenery along the shores of Lake Vanern

We arrived at Skansen, a simple but pretty haunched beam bridge, at 8.00 pm and realised that there would be very little headroom even after lowering the mast. There was a low wall on the port side just before the bridge which was already occupied by two men and a lady who were fishing happily under the large over hanging trees. We nudged our way in at the end to moor as quietly as we could in order not to disturb them. We then proceeded to let off the rigging and lower the mast. Half an hour later we were ready to try to get through. During the whole of this operation our fishing companions had taken absolutely no notice of our antics, but as soon as we started to move through the bridge they came to life and waved to us with beaming smiles. We found some pontoons on the south bank only a hundred yards beyond the bridge and decided to stop there for the night.

We were woken the next morning to the chirruping of a swallow perched on the boom. It continued its friendly chat while we had breakfast and appeared to have adopted us as long lost relations. The wind was from the NE and we had a pleasant start in the sun winding our way out of the eastern channel through Kållandsö back into Lake Vänern. We sailed up the coast on starboard tack for two hours until we were opposite Läkö Castle. We discovered later that Heureka, the yacht that had passed us in the Trollhätte Canal, had spent the night there. It looked an imposing building and after we had tacked it remained in sight for another hour.



Similar to the day before, the wind began to increase during the late morning and continued to do so until it was a force 6 gusting 7. Again it was on the nose and again we had to motor sail for much of the day tacking up against it. At last we entered the fjord that led to Mariestad but instead of

dropping, the wind funnelled through the channel, and progress became very slow. We relied on the engine to make headway and our speed dropped to 1½ knots with full power on. Our motor, a Honda four 5hp could drive us along in flat water at over 5½ knots, but in these conditions with the combined effect of adverse wind and pounding through the chop it could barely hold its own. We passed Mariestad at 6 pm rather depressed, as there was still 10 miles to go. However the channel turned sharply to the left and the wind switched from heading us to right behind. Progress was suddenly transformed with full sail up, running at 6½ knots. We arrived in Sjörtorp at 7.30 pm.

On arrival at the marina we were astonished to find ourselves mooring next to Heureka. The owner popped his head out and congratulated us on arriving so quickly. He wondered how we had managed it. He was a little less admiring when he realised we had taken the short cut through Källandsö. He asked if we had booked our passage through the Göta Canal and when we shook our heads he explained that it was necessary out-of-season



because the locks were not continuously manned. He had booked three days in advance and would be starting through the next day. He suggested that we could join them and do the paper work in the morning when the lock guide arrived. What a stroke of fortune!!

We were up early the next day and had washed and eaten breakfast well in time to follow Heureka (Carl and Elizabeth) into the open lock to await our lock guide who was due to arrive at 8 am. A young man arrived on time and introduced himself as Johan. He was doing this job part time between National Service and University.

He explained the rules of the canal. When going up in the lock, “Locking up” as it is called, one of the crew should stand on the lock side with the bow line passed round a bollard a little way in front of the boat. The stern line should be taken round a bollard straight up and down and made fast in the boat by the other crew. As the water rises the slack should be taken up in the bow line. The stern line is left as tied which results in the stern of the boat moving out and forwards in an arc. When “Locking down” both lines are controlled from the boat and freed as the water level drops. Johan explained that he would precede us along the canal in his car (a rather dilapidated yellow Volvo) and open the bridges and lock gates as we arrived. It was quite a shock to realise that he would be in control of the traffic, not just the boats on the canal, but more importantly



the motorways and major railway lines crossing it. All this to allow a Cornish Shrimper to chug across Sweden!

We entered the little lock house to complete the paper work. The lock keeper's cabins were originally built at the time of the canal's construction, in the early 1800s, and rebuilt at the end of the 19th century. One or two of the original buildings have been preserved and look quite quaint in contrast to the modern equivalent buildings standing close by.

The cost to go through the canal out-of-season was double that for in-season. For our length, 5.3m, the tariff was just over £200. This included for the nights in the guest harbours en route. The canal was 102 miles (nautical) from end to end and we would have to pass through 58 locks and under 46 bridges before reaching Mem. This took us 4 days.

The first day was a short one arriving at Töreboda early afternoon. We decided to explore the local woodlands on our cycles. We have two Bromptons and they fold away quite neatly on the port side in the cabin during the day. At night we move them into the cockpit with other items such as the cool box and wrap a waterproof sheet around them. They are quite robust and I have used mine for over fifteen years to get to work.

We set off without a map or compass, which in hindsight was foolish. From a brief look at the canal chart I suggested that we should aim for Halna, a village close to Lake Viken. Once we had turned off the main road on to a track that led into the woods we soon realised it was difficult to be sure in which direction we were going. The track wandered round each hillock and although we knew roughly where the sun was lurking our confidence evaporated. After forty minutes I chickened out and suggested that we should aim in the direction of the road we had left. We were greatly relieved when the track started to widen and houses began to appear. Soon we came to the edge of the wood and could see the road half a mile away. This little adventure brought home to me how much forest there is in Sweden and how sparse is the population. Like the sea it needs to be treated with great respect.

We decided to return off the main road and found a track, which took us to the towpath along the canal. As we approached Töreboda we found a ferry to cross the canal. This claimed to be the smallest ferry in the World and consisted of a little open box with a man sitting on one side under a small canopy. There was just room for us and the cycles. The ferryman wound a handle on a wheel. A fixed rope connecting the ferry with the shore was wrapped around the wheel and so we were pulled across.



On our return to Töreboda Gillie went off to the shops for provisions and I took our spare petrol cans for filling at the nearest garage. I was quite surprised how economic our Honda had been. At the end of the trip I estimated that in the flat waters of the canals we had achieved more than 30 miles per gallon at a speed of about 4 knots.

The next morning was grey and started with a fine drizzle, which lasted most of the morning. Johan appeared at the canal bank sharp at 8 am to announce that another lock guide would be accompanying us for the next part of the canal to Motala. We gave him our last can of English John Smith's bitter as a small thank you. He appeared very excited about this and said that it would be added to his collection of English beers. We wondered what size of cellar he had. His colleague, a quieter young man, then got us under way by opening the lock and three bridges at Töreboda. The canal took us to the final upward lock at Tåtorp on the west bank of Lake Viken. We were now 98m above sea level. It was also the first lock where we could help open and close the gates. They were the first manually operated ones that we had encountered and were an example of the original system, which had

operated throughout the Göta Canal. It used a simple but ingenious mechanism. A long wooden arm was attached to a cog, which could rotate on a fixed vertical spindle. The cog (or pinion) engaged with a rack attached to a wooden beam which linked to the lock gate. The operator walked round in a circle pushing the long wooden arm. This turned the cog, which pulled or pushed the wood beam with the rack and caused the lock gate to open or close.



We had hoped that when the canal entered Lake Viken a few miles on we would have a chance to sail, but when we arrived there was almost no wind and what there was headed us. The landscape around this lake reminded us of Derwent Water in the Lake District. However it was almost deserted and the only other boat that we saw was a pleasure steamer coming the other way. Without the 5 knot speed restriction Heureka, being nearly twice our size with a powerful inboard engine, motored away leaving us far behind in a very short time. We regretted the lack of wind and hoped for better when later that day we had to cross Lake Vättern.

The channel had become more interesting towards the eastern side of Lake Viken and at lunch time we had to pass through a narrow stretch of blasted rock which provided a short cut to Forsvik. We found Heureka waiting for us at the lock which was the first to take us down about 3 or 4 feet. We then continued to motor on through Lake Bottensjön to Karlsborg. This is a historic town on the western shore of Lake Vättern. By now it was 2 pm and we realised that we had to keep moving in order to arrive at Motala, on the eastern shore of the lake by evening. Not only was there no wind but it had become foggy. I hurriedly entered two waypoints into our GPS, the first marking some rocks about half way across and the second marking the buoys at the entrance to Motala. It is all too easy to rely on the GPS but the sense of relief, when out of the murk the hoped for feature suddenly appears, is intense. I am reminded of the story of the owner of a very expensive cruiser who was asked what he used for navigation. He replied that he relied on his GPS. 'But what would you do if it broke down?' 'Oh', he replied, 'I have two spare in the locker'!

In fact the fog started to lift as we approached the eastern shore and we were able to pick up the channel buoys leading into Motala quite easily. We arrived at the guest pontoons soon after 5.30 pm having travelled nearly forty miles. We walked into the town and had a pizza returning to BC as the rain started to fall. This continued for much of the night.

When we awoke the next day the rain had stopped but it was much cooler. We had little time to relax as again we were expected to set off sharp at 8 am. The canal winds its way through the middle of Motala and six or seven bridges had to be opened for us. Then we entered a flight of five locks which took us down to the west end of Lake Boren. The wind was still heading us so there was no real chance to sail and we motored on to Borensberg at the other end. Although there were a series of small lakes from there to Ljungsbro the canal did not connect to these but continued on a parallel course to the south. It wound its way through some more pleasant countryside and at times we caught glimpses of the lakes to our left. By early afternoon we had reached Berg and arrived at a flight of

seven locks taking us down into Lake Roxen. This lake was large enough to allow us to sail in spite of a heading wind. Although it was only a light breeze it was a pleasant change from the continuous drone of the motor. We made reasonable progress down the lake and had reached a promontory close to Ö Harg when we noticed that a very dark cloud was looming up from behind. It was tracking quickly across the sky in quite a different



direction to the wind around us. We kept a watchful eye on it and for some time it looked as though it might just miss us. Nevertheless we decided to put in both reefs and be prepared for the worst. Eventually it arrived and proved to be a very fierce storm with gusts up to 7 or 8. It did not last long and with the same abruptness the wind dropped and the sun appeared. It was not over, and after another half hour it felt as if the lights had been turned off. The clouds were inky black and it was inevitable that they would entrap us. After what seemed an age the heavens opened up and we were drenched. We motored the last few miles to Norsholm where we were stopping for the night and arrived cold and wet at 8 pm. We moored up to the canal bank and settled down for the night. We had travelled 36 miles. It was cosy in the warm cabin and after a good meal of eggs and bacon we listened to Mozart with the steady patter of rain in the background. Norsham was the last stop of the journey and there were only 16 miles left to Mem.

It was still raining the next morning and a third yacht joined us for the last part of the journey. Again we set off sharp at 8 am and for the last leg we had a pleasant young girl as our lock guide. There was still 33 m height to drop through eleven locks to reach Mem. The skies cleared quite early on and we enjoyed a warm sunny day motoring down the canal into Lake Asplången, a small but pretty lake. Then after passing through several locks we came to Söderköping, quite a large town three and a half miles from Mem. We arrived at the final lock in Mem at 1.30 pm. We moored up along the quay side and set off to look for fuel and supplies. Mem turned out to be a small hamlet with a small shop



which stocked a very limited supply of food (no milk!). We found this to be quite surprising as it was the last call before sailing out into the Baltic. We had hoped to buy some charts for the next part of our voyage but were told that we would have to wait until the following morning when someone would come and open a kiosk on the quay. I think we were expected to go into Söderköping for pretty well everything. This seemed very odd as it appeared that Mem would be an ideal place to set up a large marina with all 'mod cons' available. Luckily, apart from the need for charts, we had enough fuel and provisions to last another two days. We decided to have a domestic afternoon using the washing facilities, writing postcards and mending the sail cover.

Monday 27 May was to be our first day in the Baltic. We awoke to some miserable weather. The wind was blowing about a force five and it was raining. We waited about for an hour outside the kiosk in the hope of buying some charts without any sign of life. Our friends from Heureka appeared and explained that they had decided to delay the next stage of their voyage to Stockholm until the weather improved. They kindly offered to sell their pack of charts of the coastline between Mem and Stockholm and we gladly accepted. Later we realised how impossible it would have been to set off without them. It would be very dangerous to try and navigate through the archipelago of rocky islands without them even though the channels are well marked. The charts became our bible and together with the Gästhamns Guiden were all we needed for our voyage. The guide is published free each year and provides a list of all the marinas, each with detailed information of its facilities. Key maps show the position of each marina.

It was after 11 am by the time we set off under sail down the Slätbaken (photo looking back at Mem). We could just hold the port tack with a fresh north easterly until we reached the headland Arvidsberg. We then had to turn into the wind and progress became much more difficult. The wind with driving rain had risen to force 6 and this had set up a nasty chop, which almost stopped us. We could cope whilst we had intermittent cover from the many islands around us, but by early afternoon we sailed into open sea where the wind strength increased and the waves made life very uncomfortable. After a short council of war we decided to leg it back to the islands and find shelter for the night. So we anchored in a small cove tucked into the lee shore of Olsholmen Island. We had only travelled about 13 miles. The wind was much quieter there but we were still buffeted from the effects of the stormy waves around the island. The relief of being back to more or less normal was great and we settled down in the cabin for another domestic evening.

It rained all night but started to clear early the next morning. The wind had dropped to a force four but was still in the same direction. We decided that we should try to reach Oxelösund and set off at 8 am. The first part of the journey to Arkö was nearly head to wind and resulted in motor sailing much of the way. The maze of islands around Arkö made the journey more interesting but we had to concentrate hard using the charts to keep track of exactly where we were. Then our course turned more northerly and we were able to use the motor less. By midday we had reached the next long open sea leg. The wind had steadily risen and was now up to force 7. Unlike the day before we decided that the best choice was to continue and with two reefs and a partially rolled jib we set off across the Bräviken. It was a most uncomfortable beat and the visibility was poor but we didn't get lost and eventually found our way to Femöre huvud just south of Oxelösund. The entrance to the main channel was two miles upwind and we decided to cut off a corner through a secondary channel, which wound its way through more rocky islands. I misread the chart and very nearly sailed down a small creek on to rocks with crashing breakers all round. The wind was on the nose and the waves were very choppy making progress through the narrow channel difficult. However after tacking twice we reached the main channel and with relief turned down wind on to a broad reach for the last mile to the marina. We found the visitors pontoon and were surprised how early it was. We had arrived at 1.30 pm but both of us felt that we had had a long day's sailing having covered 21 miles, with no inclination to go further. The wind was still whistling around the rigging and we took the opportunity to hang out our wet clothes to dry before going in search of a chandler in the marina. We bought some more charts which covered the Baltic coast around Stockholm but we were still missing two or three vital charts which



covered the Södertälje Canal and the waters to the west of Stockholm. We then decided to walk into the town in search of fuel and food supplies and whilst Gillie visited a supermarket I went in search of petrol at a garage up the road. Although the town seemed pleasant enough, on the water the view was dominated by what appeared to be a large factory or power station with large chimneys puffing out grey smoke.



Back on board we had a visit from the Harbour Master for his dues.

He said he would be back at 8 am the next morning with an up-to-date forecast and the missing charts. We had another evening on board and an early night.

The next day brought sunnier weather and although the wind was still fresh we decided to continue and try to reach Trosa for the night. The Harbour Master arrived without the charts and confirmed that the forecast was better. We set off soon after 8 am and motored back the way we had come then turned north close to the large jetties of the commercial dock. We were soon able to hoist sail and enjoy a period without the engine running. We had to be very careful to check on the chart where we were as we were again surrounded by all the maze of islands. We noticed that a few of them had been adopted by birds, chiefly cormorants and herons. This had caused all the plant life to die leaving the bare trunks and branches as gaunt skeletons of what had been. There was also a nasty smell around them. We only saw about a dozen islands like this during the whole of our four weeks in the Baltic and their existence should not be over emphasised since as a proportion relative to the total number of islands (over thirty thousand) it is tiny.



We had a pleasant sail through some open water and then through a maze of islands leaving Risö to starboard and Langö to port. We followed the channel past Sackholmen and reached Krampö where we decided to anchor for lunch. The afternoon's sail with a little help from the engine took us to Trosa arriving in time to rush into the town to find a shop which had our missing charts in stock. We were in luck and found them in a bookshop. We were then able to relax and wander around Trosa. It is a very pretty little town reminiscent of places like Bradford-on-Avon. A small river runs straight



through the middle and a footpath allowed us to walk back to BC along its picturesque bank. We were up early the next day and decided to combine a visit to the shops with a cycle ride. After a pleasant tour which took us along the little river we returned to BC to get started on the last leg to Stockholm. The new charts showed us the route up the east shore of Mörkö which led first northwards into Näslands fjärden and then through a narrow channel into Halls fjärden up to the start of the Södertälje canal. The weather was sunny with moderate south easterly breeze which suited us just fine. We had a reach for the first eight miles and then headed north with the wind behind us. We passed through the narrows at Skanssundet where what seemed to be the whole local community was out in their rowing boats enjoying a fishing competition. We had to wind our way through making



**Savosund**

sure we did not foul the lines. The first bridge appeared at Sydhamnen and we sailed under this with plenty of head room. The wind had dropped by then and we motor-sailed to Södertälje where the narrow part of the canal started. The chart had a complicated written section on traffic control which required us to call up the controller and ask for permission to pass through the canal. The canal was used by large tankers and steamers and it all looked a little daunting. As we approached a group of three bridges, all of which were high enough for us to pass under, we decided that we were small enough not to bother to announce ourselves. A little further we arrived at the one and only lock at 4 pm and called up the lock keeper on the vhf. He answered us (in very good English) and explained that we would have to wait until 5.30 pm for the next opening. This was a little frustrating as we still had many miles ahead to Stockholm. Time passed quite quickly watching the activities on each bank. On the east bank some dead trees had been sculpted into the shapes of large animals giving a very stark but interesting picture.

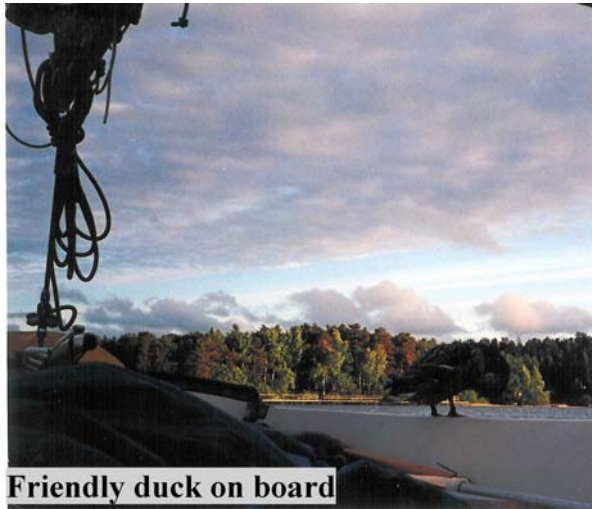


The lock opened on time and we passed through this and the next narrow section of canal just before a large tanker came bearing down on us. There was in fact plenty of room to pass but we felt very insignificant. From there the channel widened as we passed through Vattubrinken into the open water of Björkfjärden. We decided to continue for another hour (8 pm) before looking for somewhere to anchor for the night. There were houses all along this stretch of water clinging up the sides of tree covered island. Each had a landing stage and there were many little boats moored along the edge. We

found a sheltered spot just east of Helgö Island close to the bank under some trees. We were within twelve miles from Stockholm. As soon as we had stowed the sails and made ready for the night we were visited by a pair of extremely tame ducks. They boarded BC and wandered over the deck as if they owned the place and then left as suddenly as they had arrived. We cooked our supper and celebrated that we had achieved our aim to be in Stockholm in time to meet our daughter, Lucy, and boyfriend, Ben, the following day. The gods had been on our side!



**Anchorage at Helgo Island**



**Friendly duck on board**