

NORWAY

14th July - 11th August 2015

It was quite a worrying time before we set off as the boat trailer was not holding its pressure. We tested and replaced connectors at various points on the lines, and when Bryn and Sue came to stay to take part in the RDA Parade of Sail two weekends before our departure, Bryn changed one of the suspension bags, but this did not make any difference. During the next week we changed both air lines in case they had worn patches where they threaded through the frame of the trailer. Still not right, and the trailer still sank down within half a day. Bryn and Sue came to stay again the following weekend to take part in the Waldringfield Regatta, and again poor Bryn was put to work replacing the other airbag and investigating the trailer brakes which were not working.

Monday morning all seemed well with the pressure, and Bryn finished repair work on the brakes just in time for us to get 'Bumble Chugger' out of the water on the high tide at Waldringfield. There then followed a busy afternoon packing up the boat and us in readiness for our early morning start.

Tuesday, 14th July Away soon after 6 am and an uneventful drive to Harwich with the trailer staying well pumped up. The lady in the customs shed enquired about flares, but waved us through when Rob said they were 'smokey' ones not 'bangy' ones! Fortunately she didn't investigate under our bunks where we had a good supply of gin, whisky and beers stocked up for our trip, knowing how expensive these would have been if we'd bought them in Norway. We were a little late starting - should have been a 9 am departure - but it was a smooth, uneventful crossing and we had plenty of time to relax and catch up on sleep before our arrival at Hook at 5.30 (our time 4.30).

We set off straight away on our mammoth drive to Frederikshavn. It was annoying that we were delayed by half an hour when we were requested to pull onto a side road by a police car. A very charming young lady policewoman wanted to check on the trailer - they thought the boat seemed to be swaying a lot. Fortunately they waved us on after I was able to produce the necessary car papers, and Rob explained how our trailer's super suspension system gave the boat a comfortable ride. We then had to do quite a big loop round to get back onto our motorway.

After 4 hours driving, we had reached the German border and soon after Enschede we pulled into a parking area for the night, very glad to stop - it had seemed a long day.

Wednesday, 15th July Another serious driving day. We were a bit low on petrol as we started, and we diverted from the motorway to fill up from our 3 spare boat cans. Not long after we came upon signs for petrol, so we needn't have bothered, but it was good to get the car and the cans filled up properly.

Slowly we edged our way eastwards and northwards needing to reprogramme Tomtom as the motorway to the west side of Hamburg was closed. We headed further east through a very long tunnel under the Elbe. Our next petrol stop was at lunchtime with a brief break for a ham and cheese roll, then on up by Kiel and Flensburg into Denmark. The car and trailer behaved impeccably, and with the good motorways it was an easy drive and we had time to continue up past Frederikshavn to the northernmost tip of Denmark at Skagen. We had been there some years ago on our trip to Sweden, and Rob remembered the boats in the harbour and the town very well. I'm afraid I didn't remember it at all except for the fish and chips we'd had there served up in special cones printed as an English newspaper mimicking our fish and chips! We

found the cafe we'd been to before and had our fish and chips, but we didn't linger there as there was a strong, cold wind blowing. While we were in the town we decided to top up our petrol. It was an automated pump paid for by card. We hadn't come across this before and Rob had a very tricky time getting his card and the petrol to work! On about the third try we had success.

We wanted to spend the night fairly close to Frederikshavn so that we could get to the ferry by 8.30 am. About 3 miles out of the town we came to a roundabout and chanced going left on it. It took us to the sea with a perfect flat area of rough ground where we could park for the night. We walked down to the beach and along the sand with a very shallow, very blue sea lapping on the shore. The sand was mixed with millions of tiny white shells, drifted in mounds up the beach. Hundreds of white seagulls clustered on sandy shallows in the water, and the dunes along the shore were colourful with blue harebells and large clumps of purple loosetrife. It was a comfortable night until about 4 in the morning when the mosquitoes struck!

Thursday, 16th July We were at the port in good time. The Stena Line was not well signposted and we went to the wrong area at first, but were redirected by a helpful English speaking dock worker.

It was a blue sky day though still windy. We had an uneventful crossing over the Skagerrak, with plenty of planning to do with the Norwegian maps and sudoku puzzles. The last hour or so of the journey kept us guessing - we had all the maps and charts out showing the approaches to Oslo Harbour but we just could not identify where we were! We were a little late getting in, but everyone seemed very laid back about it.

Tomtom got us onto Route 7 to Bergen, though there were a few problems in Oslo as the road layouts had changed and her roundabouts had disappeared. The amazing road tunnel under Oslo quickly got us out of the city centre and on our way north. The first part of the journey was quite a steep climb for Tugger, but then we were following river courses in the valleys so not so stressful. After 2 hours driving we turned into a side road at Fa. Rob was worried about being able to turn around, so we pulled in quite soon on a concrete area in front of a square block building. It proved to be the local fire station, so we did quite a bit of manoeuvring onto a grassy patch at the side so that we were clear of the doors in case of an emergency.

Fortunately a peaceful night, and the mosquitoes were kept under control with lotions and netting.

Friday, 17th July Woke to another blue sky day - hope this keeps up as we don't want to only have it while we're travelling in the car. We were away just after 8 and had a very easy road for a while. Beside the rivers there was generally an area of fertile land, scattered with wooden weatherboarded farms. I was surprised by the total lack of any sheep or cows - maybe they were all up in the mountains for the summer grazing, but we didn't see any sign of them. Later we were told that the cattle were kept in barns and only occasionally let out on the fields. The grass from the fields was cut, often by hand and sometimes with very small cutting machines, and then harvested into neat cylindrical rolls kept airtight with a white plastic covering. Everywhere we went we saw many of these white plastic rolls.

The road started climbing after a while and soon we were above the snowline. Rob had pointed out snow before, but I hadn't believed him, but we went up and up and up into an amazing arctic world. There was patchy snow all round, and lakes half covered in ice and snow. For miles and miles it felt as if we were crossing the top of the world. We kept thinking we were about to start descending, but it didn't happen for a long time. Slowly we went down and got below the tree line. Quite suddenly we were surrounded by a totally different scene with immense rocky crags rearing up all round and deep crevasses disappearing into the ground. We'd thought New Zealand was spectacular, but this was something else! The road started disappearing into the cliff faces, and kilometre after kilometre was travelled in long tunnels. It was not difficult to see why the folklores about trolls is so strong in Norway. Slowly the dramatic scenery

quietened down, and the road ran beside fjords - still spending a lot of time going under the mountains in tunnels. It was calm and sunny and the lakes and fjords were very beautiful, showing clear reflections of the green hillsides dotted with dark red and ochre painted wooden houses. I saw some odd grassy square things sticking up over a hill, and they turned out to be chimneys on top of roofs which were covered in grass and wild flowers - a man was on top of one of them doing some strimming!

At last we neared Bergen. It became totally confusing trying to find the harbour where Rob hoped to launch. We didn't know which road to take, and kept being channelled into long under-mountain tunnels leading us in the wrong direction. We finally found the harbour, but the next problem was where to stop: everywhere was buzzing and crowded with a holiday atmosphere. There was space on a private quay next to a huge vessel, and we parked there and sought help from the luxury liner's promotion office. They tried to be helpful but didn't know of anywhere with a slip. They sent us further along the road to where an agent for motorboat sales could let us slip in, but had no space where we could leave the car and trailer for 3 weeks. He sent us off up the coast to Manger, an hour's drive away, where he was sure they could help.

So off we went again - not too happy after a long day's driving. Having got to Manger, there was more frustration as we couldn't find where a boatyard was with a slip. On the third attempt, after much driving backwards and forwards on narrow roads, not easy with the boat in tow, and enquiring from various people, we found a suitable boatyard at Mangersnes. There didn't seem to be anyone there in charge; everything looking rather closed up, but we got the boat rigged and talked to Ronnie who suggested where we could leave the car and trailer.

We had supper and planned tomorrow's route while we waited for the tide to come up enough to launch - all very peaceful and we were glad not to be in the hubbub and bustle of Bergen. By 10 o'clock, just as the rain was starting, there was enough water and 'Bumble Chugger' was launched.

Saturday, 18th July It rained a lot in the night, but by the time we got up it had stopped, though the skies were cloudy and grey and there was some wind - very different from the last few days.

We got away soon after 10 with two reefs in the sail. It was not long before they came out as the wind was manageable. But this was only a brief respite. For most of the 40 mile sail to Gulen the wind was up to force 6 with very fierce gusts of 7, and the rain was torrential, almost non-stop and the views of the islands and mountains around us were often completely obscured by grey mist and murk. The mountains, when we could see them, looked black and ominous and forbidding. We saw no sea birds apart from one gannet - it was a totally deserted, bleak scene. In one more sheltered spot between islands, Rob saw two dolphins (or maybe 1 twice!) and I saw a seal's head which in fact turned out to be an escaped buoy!

Later on we saw a couple of large ships, and Rob was careful to take a course outside the control area along Fensfjorden before we turned northwards to thread our way between the islands to Gulen. We passed several fish farms and a large oil refinery. We were tempted to shorten our voyage and seek shelter in a bay with an anchorage. It was a good decision not to stop as the bay was probably not that sheltered in such wild weather. At one point we were not sure if we could cut through between two islands - not clear on the chart. A small motor boat scurried past us and we thought it might be making for this narrow passage but it was round a corner, and we could not see where it went. Just then another motor boat scurried past us, and this time we could see where it had gone, and were able to follow it. A real piece of luck which saved us taking a much longer route.

We arrived at Gulen like complete drowned rats - soaked through to the skin. Our expensive sailing clothes had been totally ineffectual. We headed for the visitors' pontoon and tied up onto a large motor

boat. The tent went up, we stripped off and dried off, and slowly warmed up with new dry clothes and a tot of whisky. Even Rob described it as a 'horrendous' day, never to be repeated! (I may have heard that before!). My description could have been even more colourful.

We stayed in the cabin the rest of the afternoon and evening, slowly thawing out. A bit of drink, a bit of food, a very long Scrabble struggle which Rob won, and then an early bed as I was feeling completely overwhelmed by the day. The rain continued to beat down intermittently during the night and huge gusts of wind threatened to lift us out of the water as they filled the tent.

Sunday, 19th July A grey start to the day, though the wind had abated. Needless to say the rain returned mid morning.

The day then developed in a totally unexpected way. From a shouted 'good morning' exchange with a lady on a motor boat moored just across the water, we were offered a lift back to Mangersnes marina to pick up our car and trailer, as they were going back to Bergen in the afternoon and were happy to divert to our boatyard. We decided this was an excellent offer and would save us the long sail back at the end of our trip. In fact it set in train the idea that we didn't want to retrace our steps at all in the boat, especially if the weather was going to remain dodgy, and that we should arrange to move the car and trailer ahead of our sailing.

So we shut up 'Bumble Chugger', hung up all our very wet sailing gear in a hut on the shore, and went over to 'Jannet' for lunch. Lisa, English but married to Bjarne, Norwegian, were very welcoming and fed us well on eggs, bacon and beans in their cosy little cabin. At 1 o'clock we set off on the 2 ½ hour journey - less than a third of the time it had taken us to sail! We got on well with Lisa and Bjarne and liked them very much. We are still not fans of motor boats, but for me it was a real treat to sit in the warmth and dry, in very similar weather conditions to our northwards passage (windy and wet) and be able to marvel at the distance we had struggled in 'Bumble Chugger' the day before, and to get to Mangersnes so quickly. They dropped us at the quay in the boatyard and we said fond farewells and promised to keep in touch. We gave them one of our small bottles of whisky from our supply in the bilges, and they seemed very pleased to receive it.

We collected the car and trailer and set off on our 2 ¼ hour drive back to Gulen, and by 6.30 car and trailer were parked and we were back aboard 'BC', relaxing with a game of crepette, which I won. Most of the motor boats on the pontoons had left, presumably having had to return home ready for work on Monday. Several large yachts were moored there instead. A lady from one of them ('Cellin') stopped by us and showed on interest in our journeying, but then said - Oh, they'd just got back from sailing round the world! Several people asked if we'd sailed across from England - afraid we had to disillusion them!

Monday, 20th July Woke to rain and no wind. It had eased by the time we'd had breakfast and shopped.

Back on the jetty I was accosted by the owner of the yacht moored ahead of us. He also asked if we'd sailed over from England, but stayed to chat about our boat and our travels. He was joined by his crew and his crew's wife and they asked us over to 'Bris' to have coffee with them and look at their charts. We never got his name, but referred to him as 'stripey' from his jersey, but he told us of a trip he did on a Viking ship up to the Shetlands with Robin Knox-Johnson, part of a BBC investigative programme. He was very insistent that we should sail north up the coast rather than our planned trip up Sognefjord, but Rob was not convinced. All the Norwegians seem to be very friendly and most of them are fluent in English.

On returning to 'BC' we started clearing up all our wet gear which was spread around the cockpit - some of which had dried a bit, took down the tent and kitted ourselves out in very damp clothes ready to set off for Rutledal about 15 miles away. The first part of the journey we had to motor as there was very little wind, but it got up and we did a bit of sailing. We passed between several islands, and then we were into Sognefjord. We did not have charts of Sognefjord beyond this point, but our very good Pilot gave us the positions of our destinations, together with brief details of where to moor and what could be found in the villages/towns. Layers and layers of dark clouds stretched across the sky but amazingly they did not rain on us. The rain did return later but not too soaking, and by the time we entered the bay at Rutledal the weather was much more pleasant, and it was really nice tying up to a little deserted jetty in the dry. We were able to give everything a chance to air on the boom until we decided it would be wise to put up the tent for the night, as the rain is so unpredictable and the breeze was getting quite chilly.

It was still quite a while before we shut ourselves away fully, as it turned into a perfect evening: the sun appeared briefly, and we sat with our gin and tonics in the cockpit being amazed by the most beautiful view across the still water, over the low lying skerries and to the rocky mountains behind. After supper, a Black Jack challenge, which I won very convincingly.

Tuesday, 21st July Woke to very heavy rain. Good decision to put the tent up - the tent has been absolutely marvellous; don't know how we would have coped without it. So far we have been surprised in Norway by the number of road tunnels boring for kilometres through the mountains, and by the quantity of rain.

Rain Rain Rain

We passed the morning Scrabbling. Another convincing win by Rob. We're very annoyed by our smart new dictionary, a huge number of our favourite words are missing. Our scruffy old dictionary may have to be resurrected when we get home. The rain continued and we had cups of tea and lunch. The clouds slowly lifted over the trees and the rain eased. We made one attempt to set off and got the tent half undone, but it looked so murky in Sognefjord that we put it back up and had a game of Black Jack - another win by me, but not so convincing.

At 3 ish the rain had finally stopped, and it was time for sailing clothes on, tent down and boat packed up. Unfortunately we were now against the tide, and it was a long, grey, cold slog up the fjord to Bjordal, and we didn't get in until nearly 9 after 28 miles over the water. At least we were reasonably dry apart from wave splashing. Arriving at Bjordal was not as straightforward as we'd hoped, no easy pontoon to step onto as at Gulan. We investigated either side of the village, but ended up at the dock, which had huge tyres hanging down the side, but was really meant for bigger boats. It was quite difficult to get up to the top of the quay, and Rob had to do some complicated rope tying to keep us in place. Our most eagerly hoped-for find were some loos!.

Tent up and a tot of whisky, some food and a very late night - for us.

Wednesday, 22nd July Rain again in the morning and wispy clouds draped low over the trees. But it was not as persistently hard as it had been yesterday. We had a Black Jack challenge, which Rob won, while we waited for the shop to open at 10, and it really looked as if the rain was seriously abating.

So at 10.45 we set off, with grey skies but no rain, and we had an uneventful journey to Vik. With the brighter weather, the mountains take shape and character - soaring cliffs of rock and trees clinging to impossible ledges. Thin hairlike trails of waterfalls descending down to the fjord and in places torrents of water. In many places along the water's edge were scattered houses or small communities, often only

accessible by water. Where the trees had been cleared for houses, the grass shone bright emerald green against the dark rock and trees. All round us the tops of the mountains were covered with patches of snow, and the glimpses of massive mountains seen down the branch fjords were all white capped. Usually the snow would have been long gone by July. The whole time we saw very little in the way of birdlife - a few gulls and a few oyster catchers. At one point an ominous rain mist blotted out the fjord a mile or so behind us and black clouds spread across over the mountains either side. We prepared ourselves for a wetting, but miraculously it all faded away. We even had a short period of actually sitting in sunshine - wonderful warmth! Didn't last long!

We tied up on a pontoon, and as soon as we'd got the tent up, we set off into the town to catch the shops before they shut. Rob wanted a chart showing the whole of Sognefjord. We tried several places but drew a blank, so back to the boat. We found the WCs at the bus station which gave us the notion that we should spend tomorrow getting back to Gulen to get the car and trailer. There was a fine slipway at Vik and neither of us relished the thought of retracing our steps by boat along Sognefjord, taking up 4 days when we could be exploring the upper reaches of the fjord. And there was no knowing what the weather would be like in a couple of weeks. Very noisy oyster catchers and gulls on our pontoon.

Thursday, 23rd July No rain when we woke up - a nice change. Our first job was to plan how to get back to Gulen. I came across a very helpful bus driver as I came out of the loos, and he spent a lot of time trying to work out bus and ferry connections. If we left straight away we would be travelling all day and still be left 10 miles from Gulen. The high speed ferry to Bergen was going to be our best bet. It was a pity we had missed the 8 am sailing, but the 17.10 sailing would get us within 2 miles of Gulen by 9 pm, so that is what we plumped for and planned for a day in Vik.

We watched a motor boat arrive and be launched down the slip. The wife was doing most of the organising and manoeuvring, and the stolid, bluff husband kept telling us she was the perfect wife! It appeared they must have come into some money - the smart motor boat and its smart trailer looked brand new and the big 4 x 4 doing the towing also looked brand new. They moored next to us on the pontoon. We had been a bit concerned about getting through the security gate onto the pontoon - the number we had used didn't work. Rob mentioned this problem to them. They explained that the number we had opened a little box on the gate, and inside the box was the key that opened the gate. We really should have managed to work that one out!

We visited the Information Centre, Rob got his Wifi connection there and we filled up the petrol cans at a nearby garage. We then set off in a light, drizzly rain, to visit the stave church a kilometre away. It was a very beautiful and atmospheric place - one of the last 28 remaining stave churches left from the 1000 originally built. The churches were usually built straight onto the soil, and the wood of the churches slowly rotted away. Those churches built on rock survived. This lesson learnt is very obvious with the Norwegian wooden houses all built up from a 2 to 3 foot high rock or concrete base to their walls. It was very peaceful sitting in the half dark on the benches that ran around inside the church, and hearing the bells tinkling from the grazing sheep nearby.

By the time we came out of the church, the rain had stopped and with intermittent sun it soon warmed up, and we had to peel off layers of clothing on the way back to the marina. We were actually able to fold back the tent and sit in the cockpit eating our lunch and then sit out there writing postcards. Ever since leaving Gulen, Rob and Lisa have been having an exchange of text messages. Lisa has been very concerned about our welfare and Rob has been telling her of our progress. Her reply today, after hearing we'd arrived at Vik was 'Good, good, good!'. Very nice of her to take such an interest in us. Just before 5 we wandered down to the ferry quay and boarded the high speed ferry heading for Bergen. It certainly was high speed and we zoomed down the centre of Sognefjorden jetting out foaming wakes being amazed

at how far we had sailed in 3 days. We watched the mountainous view unfold sitting out on the aft deck, first in sunshine, then when we moved into rain clouds it got cooler and we moved inside.

At the ferry's fourth stop, Sollibotn, we alighted and then had a 2 mile walk to Gulen. The rain cleared, so it was pleasant along the winding roads, though it did seem a long way and the hills very steep! Everywhere the sides of the roads are smothered with an abundance of wild flowers. At last Gulen came into sight and finally the car and trailer - the trailer had held its pressure well and still looked well pumped up. We diverted briefly up to the church, as Lisa had mentioned a large stone cross on the hillside which we wanted to find. Apparently there were 3 of them around the village, set up to ward off evil spirits. It was 8.30 in the evening by now and the start of a very long drive back to Vik. Tomtom reckoned we'd be in by 12.30 am - that was fairly accurate though on the optimistic side.

Some of the road was a reasonable 'E' road, but a lot of it was narrow and twisting and turning, single lane with passing places, so there was a lot of concentration required by Rob, who insisted on driving all the way. There was not much traffic and we didn't have to do any backing to let cars pass - this meant me jumping out and putting a piece of wood in the brake system to let the trailer reverse. At one point we had a flashing orange light behind us: we pulled into the side to let him pass - maybe a doctor. The scenery continued to be breathtaking. The mountains were sometimes fairly benign with trees growing down to the water's edge, sometimes sheer vertical cliffs. There were many waterfalls pouring down, some very spectacular, and some rushing along beside the road. There were numerous signs warning of bumps in the road and of reindeer, and in one field Rob actually saw a deer.

When we turned off the main east-west E16 road to start going north on a minor road there was a sign saying it was 'Open'. We didn't take too much notice of it, but quite soon we understood why the sign might have said 'Closed'. We climbed and climbed, soon above the tree line and then above the snow line, with walls of snow on either side where deep drifts had been carved out for the road. All this time the light was fading making everything look ethereal, though it never got completely dark. Most of the journey the rain continued to rain, sometimes torrential, and of course there were many tunnels to negotiate.

We finally started going down the endless twisting road, and through a series of interesting switchback hairpin bends; down below the snow line and into the trees again. At last we saw the huddled lights of Vik way, way down below us. Eventually we were down into Vik and recognising the roads we had walked to get to the Stave church. What a relief it was to pull up at the marina, be able to get through the gate, and snuggle down in 'Bumble Chugger' for the night. 1.15 am In both our minds was the thought that 'Bumble Tugger' would never make it back up to the top towing 'Bumble Chugger'.

Friday, 24th July No rain when we awoke, but by after breakfast time, it was raining.

We were both worried about the logistics of getting 'BC' out here where there was a good slip, but then back to Oslo over the mountains. It seemed that the only solution was to retrace our drive over the mountains with the trailer, and leave the car and trailer at Aurland further up the fjord on the E16 main road to Oslo which would presumably be not so steep. Another visit to our helpful girl at the Information Centre. She confirmed that there was a ferry from Aurland to Vik mid afternoon, and she was sure there must be a slip in Aurland but couldn't find out where.

So that decided our day, especially as it was raining. Back into the car again for a 2 hour tow to Aurland. It was nice to retrace our steps over the mountains in daylight and see the spectacular scenery properly. We saw a group of people trudging through the snow pulling a well-laden sledge up to a little house on the hill. Probably not what they were expecting for their summer cottage at the end of July! As usual we

were amazed by the number of tunnels the road passed through. Apparently many of them were made 20 years or so ago when Norway was benefiting from the oil boom. They opened up communications for many isolated villages, where access was only over the mountains by roads often closed by snow in the winter.

We turned off the E16 into Aurland with no idea of where we might find a slip and somewhere to park the car and trailer. As the road started dropping down into the outskirts of the town we suddenly saw an area way down below us of pontoons for small boats and a slipway. Rob just had time to turn onto the steep road that led down to it, and there we had found the ideal spot with a flat patch of grass beside the road where we could leave 'Bumble Tugger' and the trailer - what luck! We wandered into the town, bought some excellent bread and found where the ferry would be leaving from, not at all well signposted. We had quite a long wait for our ferry at 3.40, and sat in a shelter on the quay side, watching porpoises playing in the fjord, and chatted to a very pleasant young couple from Holland who were waiting for a ferry that never arrived. He had been doing research work in the north of Norway studying skuas. They finally went off to get a bus into Flam as they had to get a connection for their train into Bergen. I was worried that we wouldn't get back to Vik, but our high speed ferry arrived on time and we were back and cosy in 'BC's' cabin by 5.30.

Another action packed day, but we did feel we'd got the car, trailer and boat all well set up for the remainder of our exploration of Sognefjord.

Saturday, 25th July A smart new Dutch flag has appeared on the 'perfect wife' couple's boat!

Sunshine, blue skies! Perfect weather for setting off, which we did at 10.30, just after our 'perfect wife' friends set off at high speed in their shiny new boat. An attractive newish wooden fishing boat had pulled into the adjacent pontoon. The skipper had got the boat at the Lofoten Islands, and returned there each year to do some cod fishing.

There was no wind at all to start with and very flat water on Sognefjord. In a little while we were able to sail. It would be nice if the wind would warm up a bit, it is so cold - seemingly blowing down from the mountain top snow fields. We crisscrossed our way to the north shore via Vangsnes point to see the giant statue of Fridtjot den Frokne, 26 metres high, a gift from Emperor Wilhelm II in 1913. We arrived at Balestrand after lunch on the move and motored to the end of the small Eselfjord beyond the town. Once into a slot on the pontoons, sheltered from the wind, we just sat and wallowed in sunshine, and couldn't believe how wonderful it was! Lot of things were going on - rowing, sailboarding, canoeing, motorboating, fishing. Two helicopters disturbed the peace somewhat, flying to and fro carrying loads of possibly building materials around.

We went for a short wander in the town and visited St.Olafs 'English Church'. Back along the waters' edge via the Co-op and an ice-cream shop. Wonderful afternoon lazing in the sun, slowly taking off layers of clothes. There was a Scrabble challenge. Rob won yet again, though I was a bit closer this time. My excuse is that I have had appalling letters the last two games! Half way through the game we were asked to move the boat, as we were in somebody else's berth. We slid into another slot which looked definitely in use by someone else, so we've got our fingers crossed that they don't come back. All OK while we had supper and then Rob put the tent up, so hopefully we won't be disturbed now.

Sunday, 26th July It rained in the night, but the morning cleared and became a mixture of sun and clouds. Having seen the forecast, we decided it would probably be best for us not to sail up to Fjaerland and the glacier. We found out about boat trips up there at the Tourist Information Office, and Rob caught up with his messages with their Wifi.

There was a ferry/coach tour leaving just before noon and we decided to go for that. Until it was time to go, we visited the aquarium which was just next to our pontoon. They had fitted in a large number of tanks in quite a small area and it was very interesting. There was a good film to watch of the different seasons in Balestrand now and in the past, accompanied by evocative music.

We closed up 'Bumble Chugger' and went along to the ferry. We were horrified to find it would cost us nearly £70 each, but we refused the ticket for the Glacier Museum, and that reduced it to £40 each, which was more acceptable but still left us a bit shellshocked! It was about an hour's trip up Fjaerlandsfjord, with steep tree covered slopes either side, and dotted clusters of houses in bright green clearings of grass. The road didn't go all along the fjord's edge, so access to some of them could only have been by water.

At Fjaerland a coach was waiting for us, and we were all transferred to it. Quite a miscellany of nationalities, as we have found everywhere - Dutch, German, French, Japanese, American After a short drive we were deposited at the Glacier Museum for an hour. We found a bench out of the cold wind with a fine view of mountains and had our lunch, watching some children playing in some very ingenious play areas based on glacial concepts. We were about to set off again when it was discovered that 3 people were missing, so there was a delay while they were chased up, and then on to the glacier. Not what we were expecting with remembrances of the glacier we'd visited in New Zealand where there was a sharp cliff edge of ice with water all along its base, and Rob had had visions of sailing 'BC' right up to the ice. It was good to find that with our new arrangements he was not going to miss out on his vision! The glacier edge was at the top of a cliff. There was an area of ice at the bottom of the cliff, and as recently as 2000 the two areas had been joined up. The ice is receding at quite a fast rate. From the base of the cliff a river of green water tumbled over rocks away down the valley, its verges green grass covered in buttercups and silver birch trees, grazed by contented looking cows who were attracting much attention from the tourists!

The coach took us back to Fjaerland and to the waiting ferry, and off we set back to Balestrand. This time we got seats in the cabin, as we'd had good views of the mountains on the way out, and sitting outside on top was quite chilly and the seats we sat on were rather wet! After about half an hour's journey, the boat suddenly did a sharp about turn and started heading back to Fjaerland - 2 people had been left behind. They'd been sitting outside a restaurant eating their lunch - I don't think they can have been up to the glacier. There was lots of muttering from those who were catching the high speed ferry to Bergen, but our captain must have put on some extra speed as we arrived at Balestrand only a few minutes later than scheduled, and passengers were only just boarding the Bergen ferry.

Back to Bumble for a cup of tea. No sign of an irate berth holder whose slot we had taken, so we are hopeful we will be all right for one more night. It was a lovely evening for sitting in the cockpit, though cooling down as the sun disappeared behind the mountains. Black Jack - G the winner.

Monday, 27th July Again, the rain cleared by the time we got up, and it turned into our best day's sailing. The sun shone, there was a gentle breeze, and the surrounding mountains looked wonderful. We had to use the motor a bit, but were happy to drift along for much of the time.

It was 20 miles to Sogndal, and we got there early afternoon. We saw a few motorboats on our way, but as has been the case generally since we started our trip, no sign of other sailing boats. At Sogndal we tied up on a pontoon as recommended by the Pilot, but having packed up the boat and got ourselves out, we found a locked gate at the end of the pontoon. So off we chugged again, and tied up alongside the main quay. It was a bit exposed to the bumpy waves, and Rob was a bit worried about the 1 ½ m rise and fall of the tide. We left her there and went off for a wander through the town. We were not very impressed -

rather geared to tourists (not sailors like us!). We found the bookshop mentioned in the Pilot, but they did not have the chart of Sognefjord that Rob has been hunting everywhere for. In fact we have been managing very well using our road map and the Pilot, so the chart is really not that essential while we are sailing through such clear waters. We found the Tourist Information Office, which was a messy place mixed up with a pizza kitchen and an ice cream parlour.

Coming in to moor, we had seen a nice little pontoon, which looked rather private attached to a private house. We wandered along the quayside and had a look at the pontoon which would be ideal. The door of the house was open so we decided to approach them. We were welcomed by a very noisy, yappy dog and a man who said he spoke no English. Rob managed to convey what we wanted, and we finally got a thumbs up from the Norwegian (I was not convinced that he did not understand English). We brought 'BC' round, and decided we were 100% happier with our lot! Rob went back to the house with a half bottle of whisky, which was much appreciated. We settled with our logs and diaries and sudoku, and although it had become much cooler, with clouds building up, it was pleasant sitting in the cockpit. A small motorboat passed us, with a fine, shapely basset hound in the prow, ears flapping in the wind! A lady with a dog passed the end of our pontoon and asked if we had sailed across from England. A crepette challenge - Rob way ahead to start with, and I thought it was going to be another dismal defeat, but my luck changed together with a crepette I got on Rob, and I just got through to win.

Tuesday, 28th July No rain in the night and blue skies for us to set sail in. We wanted to leave Sogndal as soon as we could - it is the place we have liked least, though it had a rather beautiful bridge nearby. A quick trip to the loo and to get bread and then we were off motor sailing to Fresvik.

Not a long journey, only 12 miles, so we arrived before noon at the most perfect looking place we have seen so far - a picturesque village with white painted church nestled into a wide green valley. High, tree covered mountains surrounded most of it, with a craggy, snow capped mountain in the distance. We tied up to the quay and enjoyed a beer and lunch in the sunshine. The afternoon was spent in very lazy fashion - a shop at the Co-op on the quay, a wander up through the village to the church which unfortunately was locked, then down to the nearby rushing river - another ideal situation for producing hydroelectric power. We have moved into the fruit growing area of Sognefjord and everywhere we are passing orchards full of apple trees, and fields full of raspberry canes and strawberry plants under polythene arches. Here there were yellow beehives set out amongst the fruit.

Back on board a Black Jack challenge which Rob won. Quite a busy little place - 8 swimmers, children playing around in small motor boats, big motor boats coming in for ice creams or petrol. Lots of chatter on the quay, and a family of 2 little girls and their brother having contests to climb to the top of the lamp post. Later on it became very quiet and peaceful, just disturbed by 3 girls in their 2 boats who have been enjoying themselves all afternoon. Then we were visited by 3 or 4 porpoises arching in the water and blowing spouts of water in the air. Various groups gathered on the quay during the evening, and there was some fishing, and then peace descended, and it was a quiet night until the early hours of the morning when the wash of something big passing along Sognefjord rolled us around violently.

Wednesday, 29th July The forecast was for rain this morning, but apart from about 4 drops, the blue areas increased across the sky and the sun started shining on the tops of the mountains. Unfortunately this didn't last and when we set off just after 10 ominous clouds had arrived, though it didn't actually rain. It was a grey, chilly motor sail across to the north side of Sognefjord to Kaupanger, only 13 miles but against the wind and the tide we didn't arrive until 1.15. No sign of any sailing boats - a few ferries in the distance and a 2-man rowing boat and cox, way out into Amlabuka fjord. The mountains round here don't look nearly as stable as those we have been passing up to now - huge rock and scree falls down their faces with many trees toppled.

Kaupanger is tucked into a small bay, and a kilometre from the town we tied up in a small marina tucked in against a pine-covered hillside; a few sailing boats there but too many large white plastic motor boats. After lunch and a pause we wandered off along the road from the marina hoping it would lead us in the direction of the stave church - the largest surviving stave church in Norway. We found it very quickly, surrounded by an immaculate graveyard. We've noticed before in other graveyards that they are so well tended and nearly every grave was colourful with fresh flowers. Many of the gravestones had little stone birds on their tops. The outside of the church had none of the character of the Vik stave church. There was a notice on the door - something to do with being busy, so we sat on a bench outside waiting. The rain started so I opened the main door expecting lots of activity inside, but there was just a girl showing one man around. When they'd finished, I asked if we could have a quick look - didn't want a guided tour, but she said no, we'd have to get tickets from the cafe. This rather peeved us, but we went to the cafe anyway, not to get tickets but to use their Wifi. Rob got ticked off for asking for the password and interrupting one of the lads doing his waiting job - he got his messages in the end. Apart from that it was a cafe with a pleasant atmosphere - much chatter and socialising going on.

Back down to the marina for tea and Scrabble. Another disastrous game for me - brain's not functioning! Several excitements with letters and a whole rack of letters disappearing through the floorboard slots. A lot of stuff to be moved each time to get the boards lifted! We'd put the tent up before we started - just as well as it rained quite hard through the evening.

Thursday, 30th July The day started fine with blue sky and white clouds, but as the pattern often seems to be, heavy grey clouds built up during the morning. Not a lot of wind, and what there was was on the nose as usual, so we motored most of the way to Ornes up Lustrafjorden. We have now sailed the whole extent of Sognefjorden right to its easternmost limits.

We kept close into the edges of the fjord, marvelling at the precarious footholds the trees have on the cliff sides, and the devastation to them when huge rocks and boulders come tumbling down. Not many birds to be seen - some black crow-like birds along the cliffs, and a few small birds in the fir trees. Rob thought he saw something looking like a kingfisher swooping along the water, but with grey plumage. Near Ornes, 6 seagulls came gliding down towards us, sitting in a row on a floating piece of wood - they passed us and disappeared into the distance!

The rain finally arrived and we hurried into our wet gear, but it was dry again as we went ashore at Ornes to visit the smallest stave church in Norway. We tied up onto a very derelict wooden quay that looked in imminent danger of collapsing. No provision made for visiting yachtsmen: a ferry came across from Solvorn carrying cars and foot passengers to visit the church, so we were unusual - again no sign of any other sailors out today.

It was nearly 1 o'clock, so we decided to visit the church first - on the map it looked very close to the water, and have lunch 1.30ish. 2 hours later we returned to 'Bumble Chugger' exhausted! The church may have looked close to the water on the map, but it didn't show how high up it was. The road wound up and up and up and we got hotter and more tired! Very thoughtfully benches had been provided at strategic points, and I was very glad to make use of them. It was a pleasant little church and was adorned with some beautiful carved wood, but we definitely think that the Vik stave church is by far the best we have seen. Downwards was very much easier. We bought some raspberries at the cafe - the most delicious ever, and got down to 'BC' quite quickly. We had our lunch still tied to the quay and were beginning to relax when the rain returned.

We threw everything into the cabin, donned our wet gear, and headed off across the fjord to Solvorn, 1½ miles away. Rob found a very excellent pontoon which we attached to, and spent a slightly better time Scrabbling (Rob won again, but I didn't feel so dismal). Murky, dark clouds appeared overhead but no more rain. A group of young gathered on the dock and proceeded to jump into the water with various shrieks and yells. There is a little sandy beach next to us and it's apparently the warmest place in Sognefjord to swim, but the water is still extremely cold!

Friday, 31st July Quite a lot of wind in the night but by morning it had died down, though when we went for a walk through the village, we realised we were well sheltered from the wind down on the quay. A pleasant little village with winding walkways between the houses, and a well-stocked shop.

We set off soon after 10, just as the family who'd tied their blow-up dinghy on the other side of our pontoon, were getting ready to go. An hour or so later they roared past us as we were making heavy weather back down Lustrafjorden: wind dead on the nose as it had been on our way up yesterday, and the current was against us again. The wind whooshes down between the mountains, and can suddenly appear in any direction which is keeping Rob on his toes! At the junction of Lustrafjorden, Ardalsfjorden and Sognefjorden it was really quite windy and rough, but once we'd got past the ferry crossing and into Laerdalsfjorden it was calm sailing between towering cliffs for 3 miles until we got to Laerdal - set in a flat area ringed round by mountains.

It seemed a very strange place and all unusually flat - we came first to a huge campsite, and it was near there that we came to the inner harbour and tied up on a pontoon marked 'Gjestekai'. We set off along the road with two empty petrol cans. Beyond the campsite were several industrial/commercial buildings and an Esso garage. Beyond this the town emerged looking neat and tidy and very artificial - couldn't believe that people actually lived there. The old part of the town was more interesting and there were some very nice looking houses including an ancient bank. We found the Tourist Information Office after some hunting, in a smart new building, and Rob was able to pick up his messages and get a weather forecast, which didn't totally agree with the one I'd got at the desk. But the weather seems to have a mind of its own and no-one can give a definite idea of what is going to happen: some sun, some rain seems to cover it all. There was a wild salmon exhibition in the building which I thought might be interesting, but having peeped through the door and having found out it would be £9 each, we decided we weren't that interested in wild salmon!

We got our petrol cans filled and returned along the harbour side to 'BC' - quite a long walk past dozens and dozens of motor boats; only two other boats with masts - sad. It soon cooled off sitting in the cockpit, especially when the sun disappeared behind the mountain above us. So tent up, into the cabin, and a Black Jack challenge which Rob won - just! Then Sudoku, diary writing and splicing the end of one of the mooring ropes. I caused alarm suggesting that the cooking gas might be going down.

Saturday, 1st August Rabbits! The gas seemed to be fine for doing breakfast, but when we went into the village for the loos, we peered in at the garage's gas store. They had a cylinder much the same size as ours, but the hose connection might have been different. We didn't wait until the garage opened, as we wanted to get off in good time as rain was forecast as possible for later.

It was quite a short journey returning to Kaupanger, our shortest yet - under 2 hours, and we moored in the same slot as last time in the marina. A very gentle journey, motoring with barely enough wind to fill the mainsail. Four small fishing boats out at the town end of Laedalsfjorden but otherwise just us on the water, though the ferry was busy operating across Lustrafjorden. We followed the road up towards the stave church, going via the wood sawmill on the way; signs of a very flourishing business, but quiet and

deserted - understandable on a Saturday, but it was the same here on a Wednesday. We went to the cafe below the church to get Wifi connection, and this time treated ourselves to hot chocolate with cream.

Back at the boat we were having our lunch and discussing what our afternoon activities would be. A bit of wind had got up and Rob was interested in a gentle sail round the bay. I was more in favour of going ashore and finding a sheltered spot to do some sketching. But before we'd finished lunch the owner of the very fine ketch tied up near us, who'd been doing quite a lot of hammering and sanding, came over to say 'hello'. We invited him on board for a beer, and heard some amazing stories from him. He was South African, had built the ketch himself over twenty years and planned to sail it to Norway. He had set off with his wife, but she had left the ship in Gambia to return to see her children in South Africa. Robert continued on his own and got caught in a hurricane. The yacht was rolled right over, but the timber masts survived. Spine-chilling stories of his survival and limping into the Azores with much damage to the boat. There were long stories of his onward journey to Falmouth and finally to Norway, with difficult trips back to South Africa to earn money to pay for all the repairs.

In Norway, he had taken the boat out of the water, not realising how much damage would be caused by the snow and low temperatures. He was now busy making repairs to 'Solveig' and building a new wheelhouse. He showed us around the boat, and it was incredible seeing the amount of work he had put into it. Down below it was like a museum, all beautifully finished polished dark wood with carved decorations, and full of memorabilia which all seemed to carry interesting stories some of which he recounted to us. He had his little dog aboard and a young cat which he took everywhere with him on a lead. It could not be allowed to run free at home, as they had 4 other cats who would not have accepted a new one. He and his wife, Pam, had now been living in Norway for some time, and had moved into an old school house 8 years ago. He invited us to his house for coffee.

Off we set in his car for a 40 minute drive through some lovely countryside. We were not sure how happy his wife would be to see us, as he'd taken two hitchhikers home yesterday, and she had given them supper and a bed and she was up early every morning working in the local bakery. However, she gave us a friendly welcome and made us tea. It was an impressive old school house - big with high ceilings. They had done an enormous amount of work over the last 8 years, there was much ongoing and there were a lot more alterations and work to be done. They were trying as much as possible to retain features from its school days. Pam took us downstairs to where she was setting up a cafe. She had created a comfortable, welcoming space, and we were so impressed by the amount of work they were both doing. They lived in a rather out of the way area but were confident they would attract customers. The Queen of Norway made regular visits to the area and they were hopeful she might visit the restored boat and the cafe!

They drove us back to Kaupanger. Pam came with us to be shown 'Bumble Chugger', and they came aboard for a cup of tea and a flapjack. It had turned into an extraordinary and quite unexpected afternoon and evening.

Sunday, 2nd August It rained in the night, and in the morning rain and sunshine. We set off soon after 9 in a dry patch, after some clothes washing.

It was a 20 mile trip to Undredal and we got there at 1.45 for a late lunch. It was mostly a motoring trip with a few periods with the sails up. We were retracing our steps along Sognefjord and then into new waters down Aurlandsfjord where the mountains were close together towering over us. The fjord split and we took the eastern branch, where the lower slopes of the mountains were draped with green grass, grazed by a large herd of goats. A good spot for them with plenty of grazing and no escape with sheer rocks above them and water below. The area is well known for its goats' cheese. A lot of canoeists were out in their bright yellow craft, and some of them had gone to the water's edge to chat to another group of goats.

A couple of houses perched precariously high up the mountain. We moored up on a small rather makeshift pontoon at the end of the ferry landing. It was right next to the cafe and we had several enquiries about the boat and our sail from England! The one drawback to the pontoon was that every ferry and pleasure boat passing along the fjord sent us rolling around crazily.

Undredal is a very busy, bustling place full of hikers, canoeists and campers. It reminded us of a small version of Glenridding below Helvellyn. It is set in a narrow valley between the mountains, with a rushing river running down one side, and a small friendly looking campsite in the middle. The community had contributed to the building of an excellent visitor centre, which included spotless loos and plenty of hot water. There's an ancient stave church advertised, but when we walked up the hill to it, it looked quite modern on the outside, and we didn't cough up the £7 to look inside. Some periods of rain came and went, and we got the tent set up and settled to playing Crepette. Near the end of the game we were told that we had to move off the pontoon, as two ribs full of yellow suited tourists had priority on the pontoon.

So I helped with the lines from the shore, and Rob went sailing off across the fjord, while I shivered on the quay with no coat! In fact it was a good moment to have to move - a huge liner went past throwing up waves and a large ferry came into the quay, and another largish tourist boat sped by, so Rob was able to avoid the worst of the bumps from their washes. When the waters had calmed down, Rob returned to the main quay, and when I'd fixed the lines I did a really quite impressive climbing effort to get down over the huge tyres attached to the quay down to 'BC' floating way below! We could then finish our Crepette game, followed by a stiff gin, and in a little while the two ribs collected their loads of yellow-coated tourists and sped off, and we were able to move back to our original pontoon.

All was wonderfully calm then, the last of the ferries having gone through. We decided we must get off in good time in the morning before the ferries started up again. Heard from Jamie that Archie and Hazel were lying 5th overall after the 1st three races of the Cadet Worlds on Lake Garda.

Monday, 3rd August Even with our early planned start, we were given a very violent rock around about 6 - maybe a liner going up to Flam. Then all was peaceful until we set off just before 9. Undredal had definitely not woken up by then. We had decided to explore Naeroyfjord, and then return back to Aurland, passing by Undredal, so we would be reunited with the car and trailer.

A sunny morning had been forecast, but the sun didn't quite manage to break through, which was a shame as the stunning vistas of the mountains down Naeroyfjord were looking a bit grey and flat under the grey skies. Even so the fjord was impressive and spectacular waterfalls thundered down the vertical cliffs rising on either side. As we passed small villages, there were plenty of canoeists out and walkers and campers. It was a shame for all of them that it was so cold. We saw a guillemot and also several seals. One village was called Dyrdal, and Rob took some special photos of it for his friend Eric Dirdal! The wind was its usual fickle self. A lot of the time there was no wind: when there was some, it was always on the nose whichever way we were going. For a brief spell the mainsail went up but it wasn't helpful for long.

We went almost to the end of Naeroyfjord until we could see Gudvangen at the end, and then we turned and went back. It was amazingly difficult to see where the junction with the Aurlandsfjorden was: all the mountains, cliffs and trees merged together. We passed the goats on the green sward by the point of Aurlandsfjorden, and saw two being collected and taken off in a small motor boat - hope they weren't heading off for a goat stew which is very popular everywhere! More canoeists around Undredal, and on both fjords we encountered many ferries and sightseeing boats, which were a bit of a nuisance with their washes.

About this time, the rain started in earnest, and for the last 4 miles to Aurland it rained quite hard which was cold and unpleasant. Round the last point 1½ miles from Aurland, we started looking for 'Bumble Tugger' through the binoculars, and amazingly we were able to make her out some way out from the main town. As we closed in, we witnessed an extraordinary battle between a sea eagle and 4 seagulls. The seagulls were seeing off the eagle and seemed to be winning before we lost sight of them. Rob didn't know where to moor but we knew the wash from the ferries was going to be very disturbing as it had been at Undredal. We checked all along the town front but saw nothing sheltered, so we went on to the little marina where we had left the car and trailer. This proved to be an ideal spot with a stone breakwater giving protection from any waves. It was a marina intended for small boats and we found we had a problem as we could not fit between the pontoon arms! Very fortunately right up at the far end between the last pontoon and the slip was an empty space just perfect for us. It seemed ideal in every way - we were united with the car and trailer, we were well sheltered and the sun came out increasing the temperature by about 10 degrees and we were able to dry out and warm up. A lady from the house overlooking the water shouted down to us and we were afraid we were going to be told to move on. We didn't understand her, but she finally got it across to us, that there was a water tap near her house that we could use.

In a while we set off on the ½ mile walk into town. We bought bread at the cafe we'd visited before, and then had a hunt for the Tourist Information Office. We finally tracked it down, having walked straight past it and not seen the sign! It was closed, but we found out the bus times information at a nearby bus stop, so will aim to get the 9.15 bus tomorrow morning, and then go on the Flam Railway, but it will all be weather dependent.

We Scrabbled in the cockpit until it began to get chilly and some wet looking clouds appeared. I went below to get our drinks and Rob put the tent up. Most unusually I came through to win - I did have a bit of help from Rob, as he'd suggested a good addition to a word already on the board, and I happened to get the right letters and make use of his idea! He'll be more careful what he says in future.

Tuesday, 4th August A very peaceful night tucked up in our little harbour. Grey when we woke up and splatterings of rain, and more wind than there's generally been first thing in the morning.

We decided to opt for Plan B. Plan A had been to walk into Aurland and get the bus to Flam. Plan B was to be lazy and take the car, heading for the Information Office first. As the weather was a bit miserable plans changed again, and we decided to stay in Aurland. First we visited the church which Rob had not seen when I went in before on our last visit, then we went to the Rein Glass Blowing Studio just across the road. There was a shop filled with her glass ware, and down below was her workshop filled with glassmaking equipment and a red hot kiln. She was giving lessons to a couple or girls - very interesting to watch, though I'd have liked to have seen her produce one of her professional pieces.

We'd seen a tour advertised going to Stegastein viewpoint, but as we'd got the car we decided to set off up there ourselves. It was an amazing winding, twisting road that went up and up and up. Narrow with passing places; quite tricky with some of the motorhomes and lorries that we met. The viewpoint was just over 2,000 ft up with a very impressive viewing platform built out over the edge of the mountain, with wonderful views down Aurlandsfjord to Sognefjord in one direction and up to Flam in the other. We arrived just before a large coach spewed out its load, so we were able to enjoy the views in peace, before the platform was completely overrun! Another attraction in Aurland is the shoe factory - interesting and their shoes looked sturdy and strong, though rather expensive.

Back to 'BC' via the Information Office, and more questions for the little ?Chinese gentleman at the desk, who doesn't seem too confident answering them all, or maybe I'm expecting too much of his English.

Two bits of not so good news for Rob, one that Peter Thubron intends to resign as Treasurer to the RDA, and the other that there seems to be a rival car invention to the Erg. Very good news later, when we were back on board, and I had lost yet again at Black Jack - a text from Jamie that Archie and Hazel had come first in one of their races. Quite brilliant. The rain became quite heavy and continued all afternoon and evening, but we were cosy under our tent. Rob won another Black Jack challenge, but I won the Beggar-my-Neighbour challenge!

Wednesday, 5th August The rain had gone, but there was low cloud over the bottom of the mountains and the fjord. Mournful sounds of a fog horn echoing off the cliffs, and a huge 4,000 passenger liner 'MSC Orchestra' made its way along Aurlandsfjord to Flam.

We needed exercise, so walked into Aurland, with time to go to the loos and the Information Office before our 9.15 bus to Flam. A couple from Oslo, who had been hiking, were very friendly and chatted all the way to Flam. He and Rob had some connection through engineering. Flam was awash with people of all nationalities, some off the liner, some off pleasure boats, some off coaches. We queued up in a crowded ticket office to get tickets for the Flam/Myrdal train. There were tickets available to get to Myrdal, but none to get back until the evening. Rob managed to get tickets for tomorrow, which fitted in with his plan to have a last sail in 'Bumble Chugger' down to Flam - the weather forecast says it's going to be good?? We explored the area to find a place where we could moor tomorrow. One direction led us to the river, with only canoeing facilities nearby, and we returned along the dock where the liner was tied up and were amazed by her size. We saw a possible pontoon in a bay further round beyond the town and went to investigate. It looked reasonably sheltered from the wash of the big ships coming in. It was just by a cafe, so we treated ourselves to a cup of tea while we watched the antics of a large group of 30 or so Japanese who were busy photographing themselves.

A visit to the Tourist office to check on bus times. One at 2.15 seemed good and we went off to visit the Museum, which we were doubtful about as it might have been too expensive, but in fact it was free. Very interesting with a lot of history about the construction of the Flam railway in the 1800s - a huge undertaking with all the tunnels carved out of the rock by hand. There was a short circular trail 'facilitated by art, viewpoints and benches' going up the hill behind the Fretheim Hotel, which we thought we should be able to cope with. We did manage it and stopped for our sandwiches half way round with a fine view overlooking Flam. Didn't think much of the 'art' contributions!

There was time to sit in the little park before going to hunt for the bus stop. We got there in good time for the 2.15 bus, but it didn't arrive. Buses came and went, but none of them for Aurland. Queues of people built up and disappeared, finally there was just us, a Chinese family - Mum, Dad and little boy, and two ?Nepalese backpackers waiting for the Aurland bus. At 3 the Chinese Mum went off to find out what was happening, and at 3.15 the bus arrived. Most unfortunately Mum had not returned - Dad rushed off to find her, but the bus driver wouldn't wait as he was so late, so we left without the family who'd been waiting so patiently for so long. There should have been another bus at 4 so hopefully they got onto that.

We got back to 'BC' uneventfully, and had a horrid game of Crepette with all the luck going my way. Our evening relaxation was disturbed by the arrival of 2 quite large motorboats, which proceeded to launch down the slipway just by our stern. Lots of talking and organising, but they carried out the operation very efficiently although there was not much room. More people and children and a dog arrived and they all set off. Some of them returned quite soon, but no sign of the biggest motor boat. I remained Beggar-my-Neighbour champion, and Archie and Hazel are now lying 3rd overall.

Thursday, 6th August It forecast it would be sunny in the morning, and it was once the cloud had cleared. We set off for Fram, though Rob didn't quite get his last sail as there was just not enough wind - a brief period with the sail up, but mostly motoring.

Definitely our shortest voyage - only 3½ miles. The pontoon by the cafe had spaces and we got a good spot where we wouldn't be bounced around too much by the ferries. Up at the cafe we had cups of tea and sat out on their veranda in the sun, and watched the world go by for a couple of hours. A really relaxing, pleasant time and hot for a change. We watched a New Zealand family setting off in a small motorboat, very competent, and then an American family setting off in a small motorboat, not so competent. And a couple who arrived on a motorbike transformed themselves from heavy leathers into summery sailing clothes and went off in a canoe. There were various ferries coming and going and pleasure boats. The big liner that was in Flam yesterday had gone.

At midday we made our way to the railway station and set off on our trip to Myrdal. A breathtaking journey with wonderful views down the valleys as we climbed higher and higher, and magnificent waterfalls. At Kjosfossen we were let out of the train for 5 minutes to take photos of the waterfall. It was an amazing sight, but we were soon back on the train, shivering and wet - the wind blew the spray all over us! There was a 10 minute stop at the top and then down again, mostly with a new group of travellers. It was a favourite place for hikers and cyclists; we saw many along the nearby roads.

Once back in Flam we did a brisk walk back to the boat, and a brisk motor back to our harbour - we wanted to get the boat out of the water before the tide started falling. Our timing was impeccable and we soon had 'BC' out and parked along the grassy edge. Up in the cockpit we had a grandstand view of some waterskiing, and of 4 paragliders slowly descending from the top of the mountain. They were obviously having a great time and must have been very proficient, managing to land very close to each other on the outskirts of the town. It started getting cooler, so we put the tent up and went down below. Just in time - the rain started and slowly built up to a steady deluge which lasted for 3 hours. I won at Black Jack which temporarily gives me the triple crown!

Friday, 7th August It rained quite a bit in the night and again in the morning. We wanted to get the boat derigged, but we had to be patient and hope that it would stop. The clouds were low and blanketed the fjord and sometimes completely obscured the mountains. We passed the time with Black Jack, which I won, and then started Scrabble. The rain slowly eased up and at midday there was a long enough gap for us to take the tent down and stow things in the cabin, and start derigging. We hadn't quite finished when we had to take refuge in the car. It was a suitable break for us to have lunch, and by 1.30 we'd finished packing up the boat and were on our way.

It started as a wet drive, but soon we entered the Aurland to Laerdal tunnel, which at 25 kms is the longest road tunnel in the world. There are three stopping off areas during its length, but the distance seemed to go by very quickly and we soon emerged into dryer weather which brightened more and more as we headed south towards Oslo, and soon there were patches of blue sky. We followed valleys beside rushing rivers and waterfalls, and then slowly climbed up over the range of mountains between us and Oslo. We got just above the snowline, but it was a much easier road and gentler landscape than the road we'd taken to Bergen. There were major roadworks all along the top plateau, and it was a rough uncomfortable ride for many miles.

Then there was the long, slow descent from the mountains. The mountains gave way to steep tree covered hills and we drove beside several large lakes, very beautiful; the houses and trees reflect in the still water. There were many marinas along the edges - all filled with motorboats and no sign of any sailing boats.

Very few craft out on the water in spite of the fact that the sun was shining and it was really quite hot - a wonderful change for us after our cold, wet west coast!

By 6 o'clock we were within 60 miles of Oslo and turned off the main road at Bjonevika up a smaller road towards Vassenden. It was a lucky guess as we came upon a layby amongst pine trees which was on the edge of a lovely lake with a gentle slope to the shore. A lady fisherman spent a long time waiting hopefully - don't know if she was successful.

At last, a message through from Jamie - Archie and Hazel 2nd in the fleet, with one race to go ??

Saturday, 8th August Wonderful to wake up to blue skies and warmth!

Covered the last 60 miles into Oslo with no problem and found our way to the main station. As Rob had predicted, the roads were fairly empty, most people from Oslo having escaped out of the city for the weekend, as we had noticed by the stream of cars going in the opposite direction to us yesterday and today. There were just crowds and crowds of tourists left filling the streets as we were to find out. At the station we found a good slot for car and boat - it did say it was private for some firm, but they were obviously not working today, so we weren't blocking anybody. As was to be expected, we did find a parking ticket on the windscreen when we returned in the afternoon! Our first port of call was the Thorn Opera Hotel, adjacent to the station, where we visited their plush loos, and bought Oslo Passes which would cover us for the day visiting museums and also any travel.

We were quite close to the Cathedral, so we headed there first. It was well decorated with much painting on the ceilings. Impressive, but neither of us admired it very much. On to the City Hall, which our friendly lady in Aurland had recommended. Our route took us near the Royal Palace looking very imposing on a slight rise beyond parkland. The main streets were buzzing with tourists, buskers, pavement artists, sellers of goods, beggars, musicians We were sceptical about the City Hall, but in fact it was well worth a visit. The outside was very severe red brick but imposing, but the main hall inside had its walls decorated with huge murals, all telling stories about the history of Oslo. Imposing staircases led to the first floor and there were various interesting objects displayed - an important bell and a plaque, and a white ensign commemorating a visit by HMS Devonshire. There were large carved wood relief panels along the entrance passageway depicting myths and legends of Norway. Very gruesome stories!

The gardens by the side of the Hall were a blaze of colour - mostly begonias, but petunias and marigolds as well. We made our way through them to get to the waterfront where we could get our ferry to the museums on Bygdoy. One arrived quite soon, and crossing Oslo Bay was pleasant in the sunshine. It was lunchtime by now, and we headed for a small park area on the water's edge, and sat on a bench by a very strong sculpture of a rescue at sea. The marinas around Oslo all contained a good number of yachts as well as motorboats. Many yachts were making their way past our small headland making their way out into the bay. There was very little wind, so they were having to motor.

The next few hours were very tiring on the feet! We visited the Maritime Museum, the Fram Museum and the KonTiki Museum. They were all excellent, and gave a very good idea of the hardships that were endured on the various expeditions. We had thought of walking on to the Viking Museum and the Folk Museum, but we'd had enough and queued up for the ferry. The first one that came could not take everyone who was waiting, but another ferry arrived 20 minutes later. Feet were extremely tired by the time we'd got back to the station and the car.

We were not sure where we were going to spend the night. Rob favoured heading out of Oslo westwards the way we'd come in. I'd seen a possible minor road heading north to Maridalen by a lake. I'd got no

map showing the route out of Oslo to get there, and I was relying on Tomtom finding it. Unfortunately Tomtom was not co-operative, and we set off just heading north and hoping to find a sign, but I couldn't pick up any of the names on my maps. It became an extremely traumatic journey - through narrow streets, through rough parts of Oslo, getting caught by roadworks and dead end roads. We finally got onto Ring 2 road which seemed to take us in the right direction, though it was not clear where we should turn off. Luckily Rob saw a sign which I'd missed and at last we were heading towards Maridalen. By then tempers were a bit fraught, but we were at last out in the country, and in the distance we could see the lake I was aiming for, and then there was a suitable layby where we could stop and there were sighs of relief all round. It did not have a view of the lake and it was a bit noisy from the road, but we were not going to look any further!

As well as the traffic, it was a very busy road with cyclists flashing by and ski skate boards poling their way along. When we arrived there was some transactions going on in the layby which much intrigued Rob. A car with 2 men was hovering near the entrance. Another car arrived, and bundles of possibly dresses were exchanged and bits of paper signed, then they all drove off. Someone came and chatted to us over the side of the boat and enquired about the boat and our journeyings. A Crepette challenge, which was very dismal for me this time - all the luck went Rob's way.

Sunday, 9th August A cloudier day and not so warm.

The gas ran out - it just stayed alight long enough to boil the kettle for tea, and washing up, and the top of the water pump broke. It was to be a leisurely programme for today and no rush to get off, so Rob mended the water pump. We decided we'd wait until we got to Holland before trying to find a gas refill, and just eat out until then.

When we set off it was a much easier drive into Oslo than it had been out of it. We got onto Ring 2 road and that took us all the way to Vogeland Park, which is where we planned to spend our leisurely day. The car park by the Museum was quite full, but there just happened to be big gap on one side where we could park car and 'Bumble Chugger'.

The park was a lovely place to wander in. Long avenues of huge sycamore trees, a beautiful rose garden, many beds of colourful flowers, fountains, waterfalls, and throughout the whole area sculptures of nude figures, culminating in a huge monolith made up entirely of figures climbing their way to the top, surrounded by groups of male, female, young and old figures. We made a circuit of the park and ended up in the circular rose garden we'd come upon at the beginning of our visit. It was empty and we chose a bench under the most perfumed rose we could find and had our lunch. We didn't have to be at the ferry until 5 so we stayed quite a long time in the rose garden, writing and sudokuing, and then visited the Oslo City Museum. It had interesting parts to it, but we felt it was set up more as a record for Norwegians rather than a museum for tourists. There was a section which appeared to be set up by Germans in German recording liaisons of Norwegian girls with Germans during the occupation, which seemed rather out of place. When we got back to the car park, a van was parked on the outside of us blocking us in. There was no way we could get out and we were groaning a bit when the van driver turned up and moved out of the way. I don't know if it was him, but someone had left a rude note about our parking on our windscreen! We were taking up about 6 parking slots, so not surprising!

We weren't on a main route, so there were no signs to the Stena Ferry. Some tricky map reading was required to get through Oslo to the docks. Great relief when finally we saw a sign which proved we were not lost! There was quite a lot of hanging about: our ferry still had to arrive and disgorge its passengers and vehicles. By 7 we were safely aboard, and having left our things in our cabin, we then enjoyed a superb meal - we were amazed at Stena providing such culinary delights, and so much of it, and wine on

tap! We finished our day with a walk along the promenade deck and stood at the stern for quite a while, as we threaded our way out through the islands and watched an impressive sunset over the Norwegian mountains.

Monday, 10th August Off the ship by 7.30 am, and on our way south at the start of our long tedious drive down to the Hook of Holland. Quite a dramatic change of scenery with flat fields and small farming settlements, cows and sheep and horses grazing in the pastures. And the road - so smooth and flat and straight!

We made good progress, and towards the south of Denmark we decided that instead of stopping for the night en route, we should try and get to the Hook of Holland for the Monday night crossing, so we pressed on. It was very hot for the start of our journey, then it clouded over and in Germany and Holland it rained. Late afternoon there was bright sky ahead and there was sun by the time we neared the coast. It was worrying as we neared the Hook of Holland following Tomtom's directions; 'Hook of Holland' had been blanked out on all the signposts. No alternative directions were given, so we carried on hoping for the best, and having been travelling on smallish roads we were suddenly able to join a smart new road that had been built to the dock area. All this time we had our fingers crossed that they were going to find space for us on the ferry.

We followed signs to 'Ferry England' and ended up in the freight area. A helpful lorry driver pointed us in the right direction. We still got rather lost in the town with no signs to the Stena Ferry, until a man on a cycle with his little girl showed us where to go. Our luck held - we were able to book for tonight's crossing. An extra charge had to be paid but we felt it was well worth it. At the immigration kiosk they wanted to inspect the boat, and one of the chaps thought it great fun climbing up into the cockpit while his mate in the kiosk took his photo! The rest of the journey was uneventful. We were off the ferry by 6.30 am and back home an hour later. An eagerly awaited moment after such a long time.

We had sailed 200 miles, and driven 2000 miles

