

TRAMPOLINING UP NORWAY

Rev Bob Shepton

Life is full of surprises – perhaps that's why we enjoy it so. Mind you, some surprises are better than others. If you had told me a month or two ago that I would be driving a 35ft RIB from Ireland to Norway I would have just laughed. The last laugh was on me however. My friend Graham, one of those who had climbed the Big Wall of Sanderson's Hope in Greenland from the boat in 2000, and who had commissioned the building of the RIB, went out into the Irish Sea with the builder's representative for sea trials, bounced around for two hours, and promptly cancelled the trip.

He did, however, bring the boat from Cashendall up to Oban on further sea trials, so that I could at least have the chance of a ride in it. He and the crew arrived suitably chastened – and shaken, and stirred – having rounded the Mull of Kintyre with wind against tide the day before. It was a much narrower and sleeker, even luxurious, craft than I had imagined. The reason he had commissioned the boat was that he and his Norwegian partner Elisabeth are building a new ski lodge, a first for the area, to take people ski-mountaineering in the Lyngen Alps in Norway. It is, apparently, an area without parallel for ski mountaineering, with magnificent off-piste runs down after the slight effort of skinning up, amongst the breathtaking scenery of mountains and fjord. But he has to get the clients to the foot of the mountains along the fjords first, hence the need for the RIB, to be called *Spirit of Lyngen*. It seemed to me that riding in a RIB at 29 or 30 knots as a prelude to your mountaineering could also be part of the adventure.

I had imagined a fairly wide craft with fat tubes on either side. In fact it was quite narrow, with comparatively narrow, well-disguised tubes. And, instead of a glass canopy for shelter, as we are used to on some diving boats here on the west coast of Scotland, there was a proper, full-length saloon with comfortable fore and aft seating either side, a small cooker and even a tiny heads. There were two bunks in the forepeak under the short foredeck, itself complete with electric anchor winch, and it even had the most modern chart plotter. They don't make 'em like they used to...

Of course it had powerful, six-cylinder, inboard engines – at least it had two, though no sails to fall back on – but no ballast, relying on its tubes and displacement for initial stability. I stepped gingerly aboard, noticing that the sideleeks were only 9 inches wide with no guard wires. But it did have stainless steel handles running the length of the coachroof. We set off gently across Oban Harbour with deep-throated, slow-revving engines. I reminded Graham that two triangles facing down meant keep to the south of the shoal by Rufus Castle – he had only recently passed his Yachtmaster exam, after all! The sleek craft easily avoided the Cal Mac ferry in the North Channel and we commenced slamming across the Firth of Lorne. This was further exacerbated when we passed the wash of another ferry in the open sea; I was tempted to suspect he had accelerated deliberately. Then there were some tidal overfalls by the Lisnore lighthouse and Lady's Rock, which you might not have noticed too much in a proper



Spirit of Lyngen
in Tobermory



sailing boat, and the south end of Loch Linnhe by Duart Castle, the seat of Maclean of Maclean – they didn't seem very interested – was surprisingly choppy before we entered smoother water in the Sound of Mull.

The wind was slight but it was from the northwest, which meant on the rise, so it did not let us off entirely as we sped at a cruising speed of 29 to 30 knots to Tobermory – for lunch. Personally when driving I felt the need of wing mirrors, but then who is going to try and overtake you when you are going 30 knots in the Sound of Mull? I cannot pretend it was entirely comfortable, but it did take only 55 minutes from Oban to Tobermory and 50 minutes back, instead of the usual five hours each way.

So could this be the way forward? Well no, I don't think so. As I said to them, I wouldn't take it across the Atlantic.



Of course there was a sequel to this: "Bob, could you come out and help drive the RIB up the coast of Norway?" "When?" "Well, if you came down to Newcastle tomorrow, we could fly out the next morning to Bergen and pick up the boat off the DFDS ferry." It was madness of course – drop everything and go. But who can resist challenge and adventure?

There was some difficulty getting the beast off the lorry's trailer and into the water the next morning, owing to the need for a wicker hoist than for a normal motor boat. This was eventually solved by the evening, but required us to spend another night at a comfortable hotel in Bergen, courtesy of the skipper. The sacrifices we make. After re-rigging the radar/chartplotter radome and various aerials, and generally preparing the boat the next day, we obtained fuel across the fjord – making sure we had the full 500 litre capacity in the tanks – and departed up the inner leads northwards from Bergen in the early afternoon.

I don't like chartplotters – or rather, I don't like the fact you can easily get enslaved to a chartplotter and forget to look at the overall picture or even the lie of the land around you. By putting in short legs between waypoints up the fjords as we went, I think we wandered too far west and ended up on an island near the open sea, in Bulandet. Initially we went to the 'wrong' pontoon – not the one mentioned in Judy Lomax's comprehensive *Norway* pilot – but this may have been fortuitous as our visit coincided with a Sea Kayak Meet in Bulandet the next day, when we were stormbound in harbour. It was something to do with an ancient pagan festival but I didn't want to enquire too closely about that! There were hundreds of kayaks around the boat, interestingly enough many of them of British origin.

The next day we sped on to Ålesund. It was quite bumpy around the infamous Stadt headland in force 4, fortunately from the southwest, but these young people like to drive fast. They also like harbours and pontoons, rather than lying to an anchor in an isolated cove somewhere – what is the world coming to? So after a night on a pontoon in Ålesund there was some more open sea out in the Hustadvika the next day, and we thumped along. I remember the skipper saying, "You see, 3000 revs, the engines like



Planning down a Norwegian fjord



A beautiful coastline

Elisabeth and Bob.
Photo Graham Atstick



that." There were times when I thought, 'Blow the engines, mate, what about the crew?' but dutifully said nothing. But then we were in the inner fjords on a calm sunny day, and we even anchored for lunch. The owner's partner, also part of the crew, was feeding us very well in semi-camping conditions on the boat. It has to be said that this is a truly beautiful coastline, and cruising at between 27 and 30 knots along a calm fjord on the coast of Norway in the sun in a boat like this is blissful.

For some reason the trip ground to a halt in Trondheim. Well, Graham and Elisabeth had meetings the next day with the builder and the architect of the ski lodge in the Lyngen Alps, which is what it was all about, and they wanted to be up there when building started the following week. So after two comfortable nights ashore with them and Elisabeth's parents at the latters' house, eating moose one night and wild boar the next, I flew home.



It is a happy coincidence that my one tiny contribution to Judy's pilot was a photo of the Lyngen Alps, taken from *Cloud Walker* two years ago when I was helping to sail her back to Tromsø. We had, unknowingly, sailed right past where they are now building the ski lodge. To my mind the boat, a Red Bay Stormforce 11, is ideal for what Graham and Elisabeth intend to use it for – to take people and clients from the lodge along Lyngenfjord to the chosen mountain. It is less good, and certainly less comfortable, in the open sea.

It was not an ocean passage, of course, but it was interesting anyway!



It was a thousand to one I was fine, but there are a lot of dead sailors who took things for granted. On a boat things go bad in sets of threes. When you pull a hook and then go hustle to get the props turning, something will short out on you so that you go drifting, dead in the water. And that is the time when, without lights, you drift right out into the big ship channel, see running lights a city block apart coming down at you, run to get your big flashlight, fumble it and drop it over the side.

John D MacDonald

BETROTHAL, VANUATU STYLE

Rosemarie Smart-Alecio

Roving Rear Commodore

(Rosemarie and Alfred are long-term cruisers aboard their 39ft Colin Archer Ironhorse, and have been exploring the Pacific since 2004.)

Ni Vanuatu (the people of Vanuatu) are generally most comfortable with their tribal tongue – of which there are more than 130! Their national language, spoken by all Ni Vanuatu, is Bislama. Both French and English are also widely understood, a legacy from colonial times. Of these, we understand only English and French...

Our sail from the southern island of Tanna to Efate had been an uneventful overnighter, and we had already enjoyed a day of culture out of Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, except that we had not seen any indigenous dance. Alik, our local guide, promised to let us know if he could arrange it. A few days later he called us as we passed by with a suggestion which we eagerly took up – but which was, we realised later, somewhat transformed in the translation.

Our received information was that a group from his village would be arriving from Tanna Island on the following Friday and would be rehearsing on the Saturday afternoon at the rural village where they were to stay, just outside Port Vila. If we would like to watch, he could provide transport for a small charge. Maybe we knew of others who would be interested! Whilst in Tanna a few weeks earlier we had missed seeing the renowned 'kastom' dancing of these villagers who live precariously near the active volcano, so were thrilled at this opportunity. It did not take much to persuade several other yachts from the town anchorage to join us at the rendezvous on the Saturday.

Alik led us down the hill from the main road. The pathway was steep and rough, but allowed a grandstand view of a beautiful riverside setting of Malapou village below. On a level clearing close to the water's edge mingled a large group of Ni Vanuatu adults and children, barefooted and dressed in ceremonial clothing. The women and girls wore long, brightly-coloured shredded 'grass' skirts with characteristic coloured, printed fabric tops, and had tall dyed feathers held on their heads by dried pandanus bands. The men and boys were bare-chested and wore *sulus* (skirts) – either the traditional ones, woven from natural fibres, or of bright, printed fabric. Woven pandanus bands held crowns of fresh vegetation on their heads as well as around their legs and arms. As we approached we noticed their body paint, especially on their faces, and in their national colours of red, green, yellow and black. No programmes. No times. But there would be dancing...

Around the outskirts of the clearing were several bench seats crafted from bamboo. To one side was a small shelter of bright blue plastic over a frame of lashed branches,