



SEA KAYAK SCANDINAVIA

PART 2: STAVANGAR TO HAVNOMADEN

by Jeff Allen

My son Oliver returned to Stavanger with me for the first week. Oliver had just been accepted into the Royal Air Force regiment and I saw this week as a perfect opportunity to spend some valuable time with him in a beautiful part of Norway's southwest coastline.

Ollie had helped me to run kayaking sessions throughout the winter and spring and accompanied me on several mini-expeditions which we ran in Cornwall. I had been trying to keep up with him during his fitness training prior to beginning his basic training; youth and a strong spirit would often outdo me on our daily swims from our local beach. His determination during our training together helped me to arrive in Stavanger fitter, stronger and more than ready to embark on the next leg of my Scandinavian journey than I could have hoped.

Erling Brox, a local sea kayaker who is now considered as the third member of the team, and his lovely wife Sonja were to be our hosts. Erling had agreed to look after our kayaks and equipment which we had left with him last year at the end of our first leg. We spent a day or two settling in and sorting through our kit. Ollie and I then set off for a couple of days paddling to a fairly deserted part of the local fjord system, to camp on one of the many small islands in the region.

Tingholmen Island is a popular weekend destination for some of the local paddlers, but at this time of the year the area is deserted so we pretty much had the place to ourselves. Early March sees a whole variety of weather conditions: the fjords of Norway offer some very scenic paddling but the weather can be very unpredictable. Due to the surrounding snow-covered mountains, weather changes occur rapidly.

Erling had arranged for us to go on a hike up to Preikestollen or Pulpit Rock. This 600 metre ascent is surrounded with rocky escarpments and secluded valleys, culminating in a breath-taking view down

to the fjord and across to the distant mountains. Our view was made all the more dramatic by clear blue skies and snow throughout our ascent. The original name of the rock formation is Hyvlatonnå, which translates as 'the tooth of a wood plane'. The name could originate from its unique shape or could even hint that it was once a place of sacrifice.

The week passed too quickly and it wasn't long before Ollie and I were exchanging goodbye hugs before he headed back to Cornwall. Later that day Mark arrived. Having travelled 36 hours from the US, including several stopovers, he turned up feeling pretty drained. However, he had no sooner arrived and he was packing up his kayak and getting ready to set off.

We started our journey the previous year from Gothenburg, leaving in early spring. Since we had experienced a very cold start to the trip (although the weather conditions had been unusual for that time of year) we were starting later this year. Mark couldn't get to Norway before mid-April due to a DVD launch. His business was featured in Eastern Horizons which was released at the canoe show Canoecon in the Midwest of the US. For Mark it was an important venue and an occasion not to be missed, but this meant that I had to give up almost three weeks of my allotted paddling time for this year's leg of the expedition.

Erling and I had spent time over the winter getting in touch with some of the kayak clubs in the areas ahead. To help fund the journey, we offered to stop off and do talks on some of my previous expeditions as well as run rescue clinics and coaching sessions. I had made an arrangement with a group of sea paddlers from the Bergen area to run an Incident Management and Rescue clinic with them.

Bergen lay just over 90 miles north and we had three full days in which to get there. This meant that Mark would have little or no time to get his body clock adjusted before we had to set off. It had been a long cold winter for Mark back in Maine; the temperatures there can drop to -30. This meant that Mark had done little paddling during the winter and had been forced to try to maintain his fitness from gym sessions and swimming. It was going to be a tough three days for him. I was luckier; I had trained constantly throughout the winter months and was keen to start heading north.

We woke early the next day and hauled our kit and caboodle (kayaks) down to the sea, where we were met by members of the local press. After a quick interview we were soon saying our goodbyes to Erling and Sonja. Although the difficult part to any expedition, parting company with friends is balanced out by the exhilarating challenge of a new stretch of coastline to journey down.

Our kayaks were heavy, but once paddling this was hardly noticeable. We had about two weeks worth of food and enough water for about four days. There was a marked contrast to the weather we had experienced in Stavanger last year; it was hot, not exactly summer-hot but certainly too hot for a dry suit. Luckily I had brought a set of bibs and a lightweight cag with me but Mark, anticipating the same weather conditions as last time around, only had his drysuit with him – he was going to bake.

We had three 30-mile days ahead of us, leaving from deep inside the fjord system. At the start of my expeditions I feel like a bird circling to find the direction of true north as I establish my bearings. It's not so much finding north from a compass ►

Opposite: Beneath Arctic skies, Helgeland a paddling paradise.



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needle but an instinct: feeling the way the land lies and tuning into the scale of the map. When teaching navigation at home I tend to use detailed ordnance survey maps and nautical charts, but I seldom navigate by these on a journey of this distance. It would be impossible to carry detailed charts of the many areas ahead. At the start in Gothenburg I had purchased five maps, each covering a separate piece of Scandinavia. It meant a lot less navigational detail but also that some specific locations would occasionally be hard to find, but I find this the best way. For the entire Japan trip we resorted to tourist maps and, when maps were hard to come by at times, we really did just keep the land on our right.



For much of Norway's coastline you can find shelter. A chain of outer islands serves to break-up the effects of the North Atlantic swell but the outside, for me, is where the real beauty lies. It is in that area where the sea meets the land and blends. There are few buoyant crafts that will journey down such an environment; many mariners who view the kayak as a recreational tool do not fully realise how capable a tool of navigation this ancient vessel actually is.

We came across numerous old seadogs on our travels who were incredulous at where we had come from and where we intended to go. These mariners are not naïve (they often come from a long line of ancient sea farers); they are simply unfamiliar with the capabilities of a sea kayak in the hands of a well-trained and determined paddler. These reactions were the norm on such journeys,

Above from top: Ancient Mariner Jeff Lane and the author discuss the journey ahead. North past Vega as the sun goes down. Running rescue clinics along the way helped Jeff to fund the project on behalf of the OVA. Above opposite: North of Bergen: A day of big seas and confused waters made the days journey along Norways western shores an exhilarating one.



and make me proud to call myself an ocean paddler.

We arrived on the outside of Bergen to be met by Einar Magnussen, one of the local paddlers. Einar had been in touch with me months previously and had been the motivating force behind us meeting up here. Expeditions by kayak often mean that you pass through places quickly, only briefly familiarising yourself with the paddling environment. On reaching Bergen, however, it was great to meet with the local paddling club, exchange ideas and talk of individual adventures both past, present and future. Norway has the perfect environment for sea kayaking and it is a popular pastime. Both Mark and I were astounded when we found out that the Stavangar club boasted some 1000 members.

Bergen is almost 1000 years old and was an important Hansa town back in the 1300s. The name Bergen means 'meadow among the mountains' and it is a beautiful city, well protected by the mountains and the outlying islands. Bergen is Norway's second-largest city and has a population of just over 250,000. When you consider that Norway's entire population is only 4.5 million, it highlights how small a population they have for such a vast area. The city was vital to the trade in cod from north Norway. Norwegians view the people of Bergen as unique, often considered a separate nation within a nation. This may have been due to the historical connection Bergen has with the

Hanseatic League and the way in which these Baltic traders would have protected their assets – or maybe there is some other reason?

Mark and I enjoyed amazing hospitality from the local sea paddlers. A day spent coaching various rescue scenarios amidst a flurry of strongly gusting winds briefly diverted us from the expedition. The funds made a valuable addition to the kitty, however, and helped Mark and I to venture further north. Norway has one of the highest standards of living and is an expensive country to visit, so these funds were to prove invaluable.

The weather that day was very unpredictable and we would find ourselves paddling rapidly for shore to escape the wind and to seek the chance to warm up. The weather would change so quickly that, often by the time we had landed, we would be basking in glorious sunshine once more.

Mark and I were set to paddle off the next day. The weather was still not the best, so we decided to grab a quick coffee at the nearby cafe before leaving. While warming our hands around our mugs, we were approached by a tall skinny man. He was well into his late 60s with the look of a classic mariner; like us, he looked totally out of place on land. He had been attracted to what he termed as my West Country twang and, to borrow his unusual manner of speech, 'it turned out that we had shared mutually in the friendly company of others'.

His name was Jeff Lane, originating from San Francisco but who had been living on Norway's west coast for some years now. A sailor for most of his life, his old Norwegian trading ketch was undergoing a major refit. I had spotted the vessel lying alongside the harbour wall but had mistaken it for a Colin Archer rescue ship. I could be forgiven this oversight, I hope, as it was only showing a small portion of its hull shape beneath a host of tarpaulins and temporary covers.

Jeff became a welcome delay. The winds were picking up so we didn't refuse his offer of the floor of his house. The welcome company Jeff provided was a reminder that an expedition is not just about paddling to new places, but often about the people you meet.

Before leaving the left next day Jeff took us to meet his friend, an old local fisherman. Since a young lad, the gentleman had rowed, sailed and motored much of Norway's coastline repeatedly. He advised us that we should take the inside passage and make a small portage in one place where a road separated the fjord in two. Looking at the map this would add considerably to the distance we would have to cover that day and, looking across at Mark, I could see that he didn't like this idea any more than I did. We parted company and, as I turned north away from the recommended direction, I could see the worry on Jeff's face. Jeff was a sailor: sailors and rocks don't mix well. As we paddled away I cast my mind back to my sailing days and remembered the ►



THE NAME BREMANGER (OLD NORSE BRIMANGR) ORIGINALLY BELONGED TO THE FJORD OF BREMANGERPOLLEN. THE FIRST ELEMENT IS BRIM, WHICH MEANS BREAKER WAVE OR HEAVY SEA. THE LAST ELEMENT OF THE NAME IS ANGR WHICH MEANS FJORD.

Above: the islands south of Husvaer, Arctic skies.

Opposite left to right: Snow capped mountains of Western Norway. Inside of Bremangerlandet, calm waters, outside heavy seas, Jeff and Mark wait to go around Stadt.



prospect of a rocky coastline and a dramatic lee shore, coupled with strong onshore winds. This was potential calamity for any sailor!

It was a wild day and the winds were strong; where the swell rolled in towards the coast, enormous boomers and confused clapotic seas were being thrown up. However, the day became one of our most enjoyable times on the water.

Ahead of us loomed another challenge: the Hustadvika. This is a 10 nautical mile section of coastline outside of Fræna in the Romsdal, lying between the towns of Molde and Kristiansund. It is exposed to swells from the North Atlantic and its shallow reefs extend far out to sea, creating a major hazard for shipping. The Hustadvika is regarded by the Norwegians as one of their most dangerous sections of coastline, so we arrived there with a touch of trepidation. There was a small swell rolling in and we had breaking seas on the outside, but found a channel used by local fishermen suitable for smaller craft inside the reefs. We spent just over two hours weaving behind many tiny islands and rocky outcrops, occasionally having to time short passages according to the beat of the swell and paddling through small areas of exposed waters. Lunch was at an idyllic spot just southwest of Kristiansund.

Crux (dangerous) locations can be found on every stretch of coastline. You quite often hear of their reputation through legend

or word of mouth before you reach such a location. The locals record almost all the tragedies that happen and they speak with dread of such places. I look at these places in much the same way as I view the historical charts from the Middle Ages with 'Here be dragons' written at the edge of the discovered world. This medieval mentality reminds me of Thor Heyerdahl's words of wisdom: 'Borders? I have never seen one. But I have heard they exist in the minds of some people'.

Before we arrived at the Hustadvika, Mark and I were humbled by a crux location known as Stadt. This peninsula is the westernmost promontory of mainland Norway and enjoys the highest velocity in wind speeds throughout the country. This wind, coupled with the North Atlantic swell, ever-changing currents and shallow waters creates a truly daunting obstacle. We camped in a small woodland for several days just south of Bremangerlandet, waiting for the force 9 winds hammering the headland to abate.

Bremangerlandet has an infamous reputation; the locals told us to avoid paddling around as its reputation was worse than Stadt. Local translation of Bremangerlandet is the 'where the angry wave of the ocean hammers on the land'. As the preventing weather continued, we decided to negotiate an old Norse Viking route past the impressive mountain cliffs of Hornelen. These cliffs are north Europe's tallest sea cliffs at 860 metres above

sea level. We passed under these truly impressive cliffs on a very cold and grey day and, as we faced the Stadt peninsula, we looked towards the headland and watched as the swell pulsed into the fjord. We could have waited until conditions settled and attempted the passage, but we decided to follow the old Viking tradition and portage. Time was not on our side as I had been asked to deliver a presentation for a local club.

Sometimes you come across people who truly inspire you. It may be their character, their achievements or just an indescribable quality. Bent and Inge Skauen had all three attributes. In Stavanger I came across a book called Havnomaden (meaning Sea Nomad); this is also the name of a hostel for kayakers visiting the area of Helgeland.

Although only available in Norwegian, their book was a photographic inspiration for me to visit. Bent is a talented photographer and a very creative carpenter who makes strip-built sea kayaks and Greenland paddles. His beautiful Danish wife Inge is the local doctor and together they have carved out a dream location. Bent and Inge Skauen converted an old fish processing plant in Husvaer, a small island within an archipelago chain lying 30 miles south of the Arctic Circle. The islands are surrounded with the dazzling Arctic sky, and the backdrop of mountain ranges combines to create a sea paddler's paradise. It was the perfect destination for the second leg of my Scandinavian odyssey. ►



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If you ever have any desire to visit Norway's unique coastline then this is an astounding place to visit. Bent had kindly offered to store my kayak until the next leg of the journey. The financial implications of another trans-Atlantic journey was going to prevent Mark from heading back over to complete the expedition with me, so Mark rested for several days at Havnomaden before continuing on towards Kirkenes solo. It was sad to see the team split up, but the journey is lengthy and there were bound to be problems with long-term logistics.

Mark and I said our goodbyes and I started the journey back to Stavanger. A mixture of ferries, buses and trains over the next 24 hours would see me home to Erling and Sonja's before jetting off back to Cornwall to my gorgeous, sexy, one-in-a-million fiancé.

I had very mixed feelings about the end of this leg; I had started the journey with Mark and, although different paddlers in many ways, we had made a good team together. Mark's season starts later than mine in

Cornwall so it made sense for him to continue on, but I still felt uneasy watching Mark paddling off alone. There are numerous challenges of a different nature which face sea kayakers paddling solo, apart from the obvious loss of support from another person. I also needed to find another expedition partner, or continue the journey alone the following spring. I have never enjoyed paddling solo; perhaps I have too many ghosts in my closeted mind, scaring me from spending too many days alone at sea. The safety issues also helped me to decide not to finish the journey unaccompanied.

Before I had even left Norwegian waters, my mind had settled on someone to paddle with. On the next leg, we will be heading north towards and beyond the Arctic Circle. Our journey will take us through the Lofoten Islands, past the infamous Maelstrom (the world's largest whirlpool) and beyond Nordkap, the northernmost cape in Europe. Our final destination will be the small border town of Kirkenes. What challenges lay ahead? ■

Jeff will be returning to Havnomaden with Jim Frampton to complete the Norwegian coast in the spring of 2010. Jeff and his fiancé Lizzie are using the expedition to raise awareness for the Ovarian Cancer Action charity, so as well as being an amazing adventure it is also a journey with a cause.

The Ovarian Cancer Action is a charity which, through research and awareness, is committed to supporting women suffering ovarian cancer. If you would like to help, then please visit Jeff's Just Giving page at: www.justgiving.com/jeffallen

Above: Jeff had the opportunity to spend several days paddling with son, Ollie in the Stavanger area of South West Norway. Ollie near to Tingholmen Island.