

The Country of Norway

Jim and Emmy's Travel Journal

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1979

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We arrived at the Luxembourg Airport on Aug 26, visited with Emmy's cousins in Germany, bought a camper, dropped Linda at the Luxembourg airport, then drove across West Germany and boarded a ferry to Denmark. We crossed to Sweden by ferry, another to Finland, another back to Sweden, then we drove across the border from Sweden into Norway.

When we crossed the border into Norway, both the roads and the view changed. The roads are now narrower and the stripes are yellow, but the scenery is much more beautiful with higher mountains, more snow, more water falls, and nicer looking farms. We camped about 20 miles east of Trondheim.

N, Trondheim, Sep 20, Thu - 8 - 317 - 2,306

A gloriously beautiful day, brisk, with brilliant sunshine. Drove along the fjord into town. We still lacked Norwegian money when we stopped at a parking meter, so the Trondheim policeman put enough money in the meter to give us time to get to the bank. Shopped around the town. If not for the cold winter weather, this would be a good place to live. We drove high on a hill overlooking the town and the fjord. (A fjord is an inlet, or a bay, extending maybe many miles inland, and in this part of the world it's generally bordered by steep cliffs. Many of these are exceedingly beautiful.)

The large Gothic Cathedral (Trondheim) is Lutheran, we think. When they were digging a basement for a new bank building in Trondheim, they found the foundation of an old church or something. They built around it and left it for the tourists to see. We saw several houses with sod roofs. Went to a garage for an oil change and had them look at the steering. It seems a little loose, but they didn't find a problem.

Somehow we missed a campsite near town and found ourselves back at the same one as last night.

N, Trondheim, Sep 21, Fri - 9 - 27 - 2,333

As we drove toward Dombas this morning, we saw many buildings with sod on the roof, and we saw rock quarries with a black sparkley stone. Bought a small vase made from the Dombas stone. Fresh snow, waterfalls and gold and russet colors in the mountains, but the towns seem poorer than before.

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Decided to stay at a B&B (Bed & Breakfast) tonight. Saw several signs, but no one answered our knock, they must be closed for the season. Emmy was afraid she would get her hair wet in the high showers at this campsite, so Jim brought a bucket of hot water for her bath in the camper.

N, Andalsnes, Sep 22, Sat - 10 - 194 - 2,527

Rained all night, so there is plenty of fresh snow a few hundred yards up the mountainside.

We changed our planned route, and decided to drive at the water level rather than over the top and through the snow. In Norway, there have been many small natural rock tunnels with no lights. Some with curves and no room to get by if we should happen to meet a large vehicle.

In a bakery in Andalsnes, Jim saw a long flat cinnamon roll, and tried to buy half. They said all or nothing, and later Jim wished we had bought a dozen, it was excellent. (Twenty years later Jim ate his first bun from the store called Cinabon, and whatever that certain taste is, Jim is positive buns in Andalsnes, Norway and at Cinabon have the same fantastic cinnamon flavor!)

As we drove toward Strand, found the road ended at a ferryboat ramp with the boat six inches away from the pier, and moving rapidly. Usually this ferryboat runs every 20 minutes, but this was the last one until after a long lunch hour. We popped corn and read while we waited for the next ferryboat, enjoying the beautiful scenery of Norway, with a lot of snow in all directions—but what's a vacation for! The sun was out, but when we arrived in Strand, found everything closed on this Saturday afternoon.

We arrived at Hellesylt to catch the ferry that goes up the Geiranger Fjord, to the town of the same name. We were told the ferry Captain had been killed in an auto accident last night, and the ferryboat would not run until tomorrow. We attempted to get a room in a hotel in Hellesylt, but found a Norwegian wedding party had taken over the whole place. We drove around looking at the local scenery, and when we came back we found the ferry was running right on time.

The thirty minute, \$9 (for us and the camper) ride to Geiranger, was really spectacular! At any one time we could see 10 or 20 waterfalls, sheer rock cliffs, little farms hung on the side of the mountains. We were told small children are tied to a post with a long rope when they play in the yard, so they won't fall down the hill. Saw where farmers in Norway let hay down to the barn on a rope.

Stayed at the Hotel Union. Very pleasing but twice as expensive as expected. Jim asked the price double, but the Norwegians thought he was smart enough to multiply by two. Had a nice room at Hotel Union, with an excellent view, and nice meals. Hotel was started in the 1800's in an old house. They kept adding wings, until last year when they finally tore down the old house. It's now run by the third generation. Talked to the wife of the second generation. She came to the Geiranger Fjord as a summer worker in 1928, then married the boss in 1933. She told how hard it is to get good Hotel workers, and it's even harder to get a good day's work out of them. She suggested the caliber of the guests has also deteriorated.

We had met some young people on the ferryboat, and they were in the dining room/bar of the hotel. It was one woman's 20th birthday. She was a folk dance

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teacher, another woman was a student in a commercial school. The Norwegian fellows included an English teacher, a plumbing supply salesman, a journalist, and a man who helped run the family store and ferryboat dock. Had an interesting discussion, they all spoke English.

N, Geiranger, Sep 23, Sun - 148 - 2,775

The two beds in Geiranger's Hotel Union are very narrow and placed end to end. The shower is at the end of a rubber hose and there is no shower curtain, but there's a drain in the bathroom floor.

The two electric heaters lack thermostats. Only a thick feather tick for cover, so it's first too hot, then too cold. Carpet's thin with no pad. The view is tremendous, and really the hotel is new and very clean, but just not our style.

Left Geiranger late in the morning and drove up, up over the mountains through scenes of grandeur and, for Emmy, an hour of terror interrupted by moments of sheer panic! The road above Geiranger went higher and steeper and got narrower and rougher with blind curves. With large busses and trucks headed toward us through the blowing snow, the road seemed even narrower. At the top it was snowing and blowing with a drop down to some lakes on Emmy's side of the road. If we hadn't been convinced we were now on the way down, we may have turned back.

Soon reached a very good road with three tunnels ranging from one and a half to three and a half miles long. When we came out the other end, we were well below the snow but it was still raining. The drive today alternated between mountains, lakes, valleys and Norway's fjord scenery, with waterfalls, hanging farms, flocks of sheep and goats. (1992—By now we have seen hundreds of beautiful scenic locations in Europe and in the US, but for pure outdoor beauty, the Norwegian fjord coast is number one!)

At one point in Norway, we were driving along a narrow, twisty, up and down road in an area filled with huge boulders, small trees and brush, but with plenty of greenery to feed a flock of sheep. From our vantage point on the side of a hill we could see two Norwegian shepherds in the distance, attempting to herd their flock. Both shepherds were dressed in old tattered coats that hung in loose folds like a cloak, and appeared as if costumed for a part in an old Hollywood movie.

As we drove around a hairpin curve we noticed one shepherd was headed one way, but a sheep had hidden behind a boulder and was now headed in the opposite direction. Another sharp curve brought us to the second man. We pointed and gestured, and when he finally understood we were telling him about a straggler, we expected he would head immediately toward the obstinate sheep. Instead, he reached among the folds of his garments, brought out his two-way radio, and told his friend to go get the wayward one. Aw well, so much for the old days, and the old ways!

Took a ferryboat from Lavik to Brekke, 40 minutes for \$5. Followed a two way road that was mostly one lane wide, looking for a campsite. Would have stayed at a sod-roofed hotel we looked at, but it seemed too expensive for what it was. Drove a little longer and found a campsite with a light in the restroom. Jim

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went across the road to ask at a farm house, and found the farmer owned the campsite.

Nice campsite with good plumbing, but we were the only people there. The bed in the camper is really much nicer and more comfortable than beds in the hotel we stayed in last night. Today we talked to a man about putting a gas heater in the camper, but could find no good place to put it.

N, Brekhe, Sep 24, Mon - 11

This morning we were about a 100 miles and a couple of ferryboat rides from Bergen. Finally arrived in Bergen out of gas, food and money.

We had forgotten what day Friday was, then tried, without success, to get some money on Saturday, but no bank was open. Bergen's fishermen's wharf is colorful, and we found areas of the town where the houses looked more like Holland, than other parts of Norway. Years ago they had so much shipping between Bergen and Holland, they were more involved with Amsterdam than with other parts of Norway.

Very difficult (but fantastic!) couple of hours of driving, with road repairs in addition to the unbelievably narrow rough roads and tunnels. Someone had to get way over to the side each time two vehicles met. Wouldn't have missed Norway for the world!

N, Bergen, Sep 25, Tue - 12 - 259 - 2,934

This campsite was closed for the season so there was no one to collect the money, but other campers are also here. We popped corn and invited the woman from next door.

She brought her booze, and a couple of packs of cigarettes. She is from Australia and had been travelling since January. She is spending money she received from her mother's estate—either spend it or pay it in taxes. She has already driven around Africa and much of Europe, in the right-hand drive VW purchased in England. We found she has night blindness and cannot see in these tunnels. She had to be led back to her camper, so we're glad to be headed the other direction, toward Oslo!

Missed one ferryboat by five minutes, and did much driving on narrow roads. One spot was so steep the switch-backs had to be tunnelled. A fantastic view of the scenery of Norway, when there was time to look, with waterfalls and rain all the way. Suddenly the scenery changed from beautiful to blah and nothing but nothing, and later there were farms the rest of the way to Oslo. Hard to believe so much change and contrast in scenery in just a few miles.

Drove across the city at rush hour and found the campsite. Oslo looks like a comfortable place to live, but we don't see much in the way of picturesque buildings, etc., for tourists. The tourist literature from Oslo shows a picture of the City Hall, a rather new large brick building. We know if a new brick building is the main thing for a tourist brochure, they don't have much else for the tourist. Nice office buildings and plenty of stores.

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N, Oslo, Sep 26, Wed - 13

Emmy woke up this morning feeling weak and dizzy. Ate a banana, took a pill and got out of the camper for a walk and had to vomit. Thank goodness she was outside the camper!

We decided that if Emmy is not feeling well we should check into a hotel so she can rest in comfort. Found an almost new hotel in Oslo with a shower, and two very hard beds. Emmy would have rested better in the camper. Motel 6 would have been much better at less than the \$70, based on the little room and the hard bed. Our room is on the 6th floor and we could still hear Oslo street noises all night. We are learning—the camper is really more comfortable, and campsites are quieter than hotels!

By this afternoon Emmy was feeling better and wanted some fresh air so we walked around downtown and visited City Hall, which they are very proud of.

N, Oslo, Sep 27, Thu - Hotel - 358 - 3,292

Emmy is OK this morning. Ate breakfast in the Hotel Grand breakfast room (included in the cost at most hotels in Europe), and looked around the town some more, both on foot and in the camper. Drove high on the hill to see the ski jump and look over the city.

We left Norway, drove across a piece of Sweden, rode a ferry to Denmark, then visited Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Monaco, Italy and Switzerland, and back to Germany.

From Luxembourg's airport, on November 29 we flew to Iceland for a couple of days, then home to the US.