



Mountain Molly's Epic Lust for Latitude



Here's the tale, told day by day, of a trip up North, as far as you can go on the European mainland.....

June 6th 2011. We leave Loddon, Norfolk, England, with 26,992 miles on the clock.

June 7th Tuesday. We're just short of Cassel on the D933 which is a little wiggly road between France and Belgium. The campsite is very rural and the only noises are birdsong and gently rustling trees. Apparently we just missed a thunderstorm, everything is steaming as it's oddly hot.

Molly broke down twice. First near Chelmsford and again near Dartford with a dodgy power feed to her ignition coil, one of those electrical problems which cool down and fix themselves while you're unpacking the spanners. Several people stopped for a chat so we weren't quite on the right ferry, but any one will do, so that didn't matter.

The pack is very easy to take on and off. Each bag can be removed independently and everything is contained in the bags, very neat. Sadly it's as aerodynamic as a block of flats. I think it costs us about 5% more in petrol. We have so much stuff it doesn't all fit in the tent. It took a while to figure out what to do with it when we got here.

June 8th Wednesday. AM. Waiting for the tent to dry out, and waiting and waiting. This corner of NE France is cloudless, a bit of a bonus but there was nearly a frost last night after yesterday's drenching. Condensation isn't half of it. Today we plan to gently potter across Belgium and Holland using the bare minimum of autoroute. In fact we plan to do the whole trip like that. Molly's OK with the weight, sort of. I've eaten some of it and we've begun to consume two stroke oil. This morning the pack is a little better organised with less of the last minute throw anything in anywhere which always happens at the start.

June 8th Wednesday. PM. Belgium is in the way. That's about all you can say about it really. I don't like the autoroute. It's too fast for us. I always feel obliged to push harder than I want to, it's noisy and stressful and there's absolutely nothing to look at. However the alternative in Belgium is slogging through what seems to be one giant industrial estate. Almost all of it has a blanket 70kph speed limit. Molly likes it. She's been purring along sweetly, holding the traffic up while we all wait for her soft, dozy power delivery to ease her up to cruising before the next set of lights or roundabout, all day.

I couldn't find the campsite I wanted, the one we used last time. The road's up all over the place and it's all a maze of diversions. We're on another site run by Ron Jansson who races Siberian Huskies. His trophies are everywhere and there's a Russian Federation flag limp on a pole even though we're in Holland. It must be a very expensive sport because he wanted €13 for a night's camping. As I got back on my bike he said "Well how much do you want to pay then?" in perfect English.

€8 it is then.

Are we enjoying it yet? No, not yet. It's all been a bit Belgium today.

June 9th, Thursday,
27,431 miles.

The trouble is the only campsites signposted from the major routes tend to be vast comprehensive leisure complexes with sports facilities, family activities and adult fun at night. I followed a couple of signs on my way to a site I know of just north of Soltau (Germany) because I had time and you never know, they might lead to something.



Sign A was the usual row after row of beautifully tended, permanent holiday homes. Reception was in the restaurant, bar, gym, sports hall, cinema building. The receptionist was young, blonde, uniformed and also beautifully tended. "Will you want electricity?" she said as she was adding up the quote. "No?" she said, aghast.

For a fraction of her price we're camped on a farm at the end of sign B. Reception here is shouting at the farmer's wife over the noise of the tractor she was driving. There are holiday homes embedded in the trees and hedges but it's all comfortably scruffy. Running a campsite looks like far too much fuss. It seems to spread out for miles and some of it looks to have been inhabited recently.

I think I might have got heat stroke yesterday. Woolly overalls are fine for a long ride on a motorcycle but in Belgium you don't ride for long. I kept them on because the pack's so full there's nowhere to put them. In Belgium there's nowhere nice to stop so I sat in the traffic and put up with the temperature. That night I was on fire in the sleeping bag and had to sleep on it instead.

It isn't possible to get a taste of what it must be like to be Belgian by flying through it in 45 minutes on the autoroute. You need to be snarled up in the traffic with day to day Belgians.

Is Molly a mile eating, transcontinental cruising missile then? Sadly not. The point in this is being able to live with her shortcomings rather than just buying another motorcycle, so our time together develops into a relationship rather than a brief

flirtation until something better comes along. If you're going to start thinking about smoother, faster, more comfortable or whatever there will always be something even smoother, faster or more comfortable than that. If that's what does it for you, you'll need another motorcycle every six months and you'll never get to know any of them. There's showrooms full of that sort of thing but there's only one Molly, and she's in North Germany today!

The IZH Planeta Sport, which is what Molly is, is an unfortunately flawed motorcycle. Most of them seem to have broken quite quickly as a result of that "sport" tag and the IZH attempt to live up to it. Molly's not standard and develops less peak power than her sisters but considerably more than they do at a smooth, relaxed 3,500rpm. She uses a lot less fuel like this and should last longer, I hope. I can't imagine what trying to haul tons of camping kit on a standard Sport would be like.

Molly's modifications cost nothing and she has little market value. There's very little money in the Molly experience which means I don't have to work hard to earn it. We're trading time for money here in the hope that spending time will lead to Molly becoming precious as our relationship develops. The experience leads to a more profound wealth than anything I could have bought with money.

June 10th, Friday, 27,674 miles.

We're on holiday for a day or two in the sleepy little seaside town of Faxe Ladeplads (Denmark), because I'd like a day off.

Everything's small here. There's two small supermarkets with some serious Danish food prices and oddly enough, no fat people.

Today Germany was lovely. Rural Germany that is. It's lush, green and pretty and the bit we camped in last night especially so. The roads are good, the signs make sense and early in the morning, there's no one around. Then Hamburg. You can't get round Hamburg without an autoroute so we did that with a stiff tailwind. Maybe the pack acts like a sail? We were spinning along, free and easy so I thought we'd take advantage of it and rode autoroute all the way. By the time we reached Fehmarn the wind had turned and hot, humid German weather changed into cold, bright Danish. Out of the wind, in the early evening sunshine, this site is lovely. I've been here before.

Like Hamburg, you have to use the autoroute because only that goes over the



bridges and into the tunnels which connect up Denmark. Molly's not fun uphill, into the wind holding up a fleet of Scania's.

Something's happened to the front tyre. We didn't have a new one even though it was Russian, because it has plenty of tread. It's a peculiar shape now and running out badly, which, because we're tail heavy, makes the front shake at wheel speed. Was it just irritating when I got weary? Tomorrow I'll see if I can adjust the rim to compensate for it. It felt fine on the way to Dover.

Today was the most expensive day so far. A €15 tank of German gas, a 145DKK tank of Danish, a €45 ferry, strangely cheaper than booking on line from the UK and a 21DKK loaf of bread, yes that's 21DKK, most of them are 25, that's £3 to you.

A little girl just introduced herself. I've no idea what she said. I suppose they don't get many poor people on this site. Molly is the only motorcycle and mine is the only tent. She seemed genuinely interested. I expect her Dad owns a beautiful motorhome with an awning the size of a tennis court, with gas powered barbie and satellite TV, just like everyone else on here. They've all got tables with table cloths and they're drinking wine with their barbecued chicken. Just think of all that washing up. Achievement has to be in spite of some discomfort to be cool doesn't it? I'll love it when it's over.

June 11th, Saturday, 27,897 miles.

The front wheel is round now. Not in the absolute, mathematical sense but in its 30 year old Russian way. One of the spokes has a rusty nipple which wouldn't move but it isn't loose so it's doing something to help, I'll watch that.

We have 100 miles of autoroute to do tomorrow in order to cross the Øresund Bridge and get pointed up Sweden the right way. We have to aim round all those lakes. Sjælland today is hot and sunny, nice.

The pack has to be lighter. It's a bit nuts carrying around so much food, a consequence of shopping with Lizzie. I don't think I need so many clothes. It'll take two weeks to wear them all and then I'll spend all day washing.

Back in the shed you just put this in or just put that in. It doesn't weigh very much and it might come in handy. Even at Scandinavian prices could you buy it all locally if you had to, cheaper than the petrol it takes to struggle across Europe with it? Imagine how much junk you'd pack into a motorhome.

Later, I didn't bother taking the camera because this is Smallville and it's quiet. I was only going to stroll into town for a few bits and pieces. Then there was a sort village fete but with medieval costume, folk music and a car boot sale. There were musket firing soldiers, a blacksmith's forge and a burger van. The band were brilliant. They had all sorts of ancient instruments including a thing which looked

like a violin but it had a handle on the end turning a wooden wheel to vibrate the strings. These were stopped by wooden hammers on pegs. The player was dressed like a Viking, screwed with one hand and played pegs with the other. What a noise! Real foot stomping stuff. The crowd sung along, in Danish of course. I caught something about sailing off across the North Sea to raid England, like Ragnar Lothbrok.

Spectacular is too small a word for the Øresund Bridge. From the Danish end you first go underwater for 2.5 miles and emerge on a man made, artificial island. The bridge itself is a further 5 miles to Sweden, rising 669' above sea level. The reason for the tunnel was because elevating a further section of the bridge would have interfered with air traffic at nearby Copenhagen Airport and it was necessary to leave a channel clear of the ice floes trapped against the bridge in winter. It took four years to build, opened in 2000 and carries 20,000 road vehicles every day, and lots of trains. The bridge's latitude is 55° 34' north, about level with Northumberland.



By the way, Statoil 2T oil is 99DKK per litre for lawnmowers and 165DKK for the good stuff, that's £20! Good job I bought my own.

Some of my neighbours on the campsite arrived in the afternoon's thunderstorm. It only rained for 15 minutes. "What about those poor Norwegians!" they said. Poor Norwegians? Landslides, road closures, floods, weeks of torrential rain! The day's forecast for Oslo was a constant heavy downpour. They didn't know about Sweden.

June 12th, Sunday, 28,165 miles.

We're camped in pine trees by a lake. We're in Sweden, try not to. It's near a town called Mullsjö at nearly 58° north, a bit further up than Jönköping. This is more like

it. We're a little further South than the North Coast of Scotland. The air is thick with mosquitos.

It's a good day if I can get about 250 miles in by mid afternoon, put the tent up then go have a look round wherever we are, go shopping or fix anything that broke. Early in the morning when I'm rested and fresh, rolling along through open countryside like this is a delight. A few hours later it seems to go on and on and on. Sweden is lots of open countryside. There doesn't seem to be enough Swedes to fill it up. I've passed several village signs and thought "Well where is it then?" You have to look for the village itself. There'll be a few beautifully painted wooden clad houses spread thinly in the trees somewhere.

Mullsjö is spread round the edge of a lake. There's a centrum but that's just where the shops are. I know it's Sunday but there's no one about. Both the kebab house and the pizza shop are open but there are no customers.



Sweden will be at work tomorrow, I wonder if there are enough cars for a traffic jam.

Molly had a lovely day today, storming along. There must still be some German petrol in her tank, formulated for BMW. Perhaps it's just the round front wheel making her feel good. After junction 46 on the E20 we left the traffic behind and headed into the wilderness. It'll be like this for a few days. Northern Sweden is a thousand miles of pine trees.

I introduced myself to the campsite receptionist with "Jag är ledsen, jag pratar inte Svenska." "Oh OK," she said, "English?" Yeah alright then. Sad isn't it? Later I caught her closing the campsite shop when I wondered if there was any bread. "No," she said, "Have these." and gave me a couple of ham and cheese rolls. Do I look hungry? Oh you poor bastard, having to ride all the way from England on that scruffy little motorcycle!

June 13th, Monday, 28,419 miles.

We've changed our cold wind and its dry, bright weather for warm and wet. For the last 20 miles or so it felt humid. The first of several heavy showers this afternoon fell just as I found this campsite. It's about 25 miles short of Mora in the middle of nowhere, 61° North, just a little further North than Shetland. So far I haven't had to

ride in the rain. The site's in the middle of a hundred million pine trees. Everyone has sheds painted the same colour as their houses, full of firewood, in June. You'd rely on a wood burner if you lived in an ocean of fuel.



It's so still later there's hardly a ripple on the inevitable lake and the air's full of fluttering moths and dancing mayflies.

Molly's not a useless pain in the arse. It would have been nice if the gearing was a little lower and if we'd found time to get a proper Mikuni needle instead of the home made lash up I guessed at.

It would have been good to have experimented with the exhaust pipe shape more but this one will do, we can live with it. The hose from the air filter is too restrictive. It was my heavy handed, emergency attempt to keep the intake quiet. It's still too loud because the noise isn't the air filter at all, it's the petrol tank. There's some sort of scientific phenomenon going on and the tank amplifies the induction roar. It gets louder as it gets empty. Molly didn't do it when she had a Voskhod tank on her.



She's doing better than the Chang Jiang did, with twice the weight impediment and for less fuel as well. The CJ never did better than 60mpg. Molly does 65. We're about 2° south of last time at this point on holiday, but I've had a day off. A day's ride is about 2°30' in latitude.

Last time, I had to start going home from here. Back at work on Monday morning,

no one was even slightly interested. We had to think about flatness, parallelism and surface finish, that's what we were paid for. The inner glow of achievement only lasted until morning tea break.

Everyone on this site is Dutch, so's the bloke who runs it. It must be in some Dutch guide book. "What is it then?" he asked. It's an IZH from the USSR in 1981. No there are no spares, yes I'm on my own and no I'm not very good at welding.

June 14th, Tuesday, 28,668 miles.

Tonight we're somewhere called Lit, a bit up from Östersund, 63° north. This is 30' norther than we reached last time and the Northeast I've ever been.

When we set off this morning it was warm and promising to get sunny. Then we went up, in elevation as well as latitude and the dark heavy clouds came down to meet us. Norway isn't far away and I think this is the edge of Norway's mountains. The cloud base was just a few feet above my head in places. Although it didn't rain properly it was cold and wet enough to need maximum layers on. Everything's dripping wet up there and covered in squishy, spongey moss. Rocky streams run everywhere and between piles of rocks, the ground is too boggy to walk on. The pine trees are different too. Between Mora and Östersund, the only town is Sveg, a hundred miles from either of them. There isn't really a centre of population anywhere else, just handfuls of houses and the odd cabin. Whatever people do for a living here must have something to do with pine trees.

Did you know that the lowest recorded temperature in Östersund in June was -3C? It reached +32C in June once.

I saw a sign for Östersund Camping so I thought I'd take a look. Yet another heart stopping blonde receptionist told me the privilege would cost 170SEK. More pine trees and another lake it is then.



In Sveg I met a German BMW pilot who'd done the North of Norway four times. He had nothing good to say about Nordkapp at all. €40 to get through the tunnel, €15

to park, €25 to get in the visitor's centre and €40 to get back and 60 to 100 tour buses every day! Forget it he said, it's bollocks, a Scandinavian Land's End. Round a bit, North from Finland was apparently lovely. It was only 3C the week before. It was so stormy he could only ride at 40kph, but it was still lovely. He pointed out the good bit on my map and took some photos of Molly. He thought she was marvellous.

June 15th, Wednesday, 28,952 miles.

I sort of get Sweden now. It's a valid place to be Ray Mears in. Campsite chat last night was about the 99.999% of it you can't see through the roadside trees. It's a vast, untouched wilderness the Swedes go hunting, fishing and driving their rally cars in. They do all that because there's so much space. Nowhere else in Western Europe is that quiet. There are loads of bears but not many people have seen one.

This morning on the campsite car park, two blokes were sorting out their kit for some outback thing. They had serious 4x4 trucks and rifles, fishing gear and proper wilderness survival clothing. Real camping, not like me and Molly. I like campsites and their shower blocks. I make this hard enough without sacrificing the most basic of luxuries, hot water. We could free camp, it's legal in Sweden.

Today's been a bit mad. It rained all night and the weather forecast for Östersund was awful. Lycksele looked better but rather than pack everything wet and risk not being able to dry it out to sleep in, I thought I'd stay in Lit. Then it stopped raining so I changed my mind.

Off to a late start and several soakings later we got to Lycksele to discover the campsite was a leisure complex and nowhere near the town. I was sure there'd be another one soon so I kept going but there wasn't until I got to Avidsjaur, 65° North. The average daily maximum temperature in January is -8.7C. Snowmobile tours are a big thing here.

The strange thing for a Southerner is when the sun gets to around what should be 5 o'clock high, it feels like the day is winding down. I was happy to find this site, worried I was running out of time. Since then I've put the tent up, dried it, had a shower, done some washing, walked into town, had dinner and I'm writing this in the sunshine at 9.30pm. It's still 19C and we have two more hours of bright sunshine left. We are only 1° South of Poll Cirkeln. Clouds of mosquitos drive you nuts wherever you go



up here. It must be maddening out in the wilderness.

I saw my first reindeer this afternoon. We are now apparently in Lapland.

Avidsjaur has one long main street and that's pretty much it.

Everything else is 100 miles away so the youths just cruise up and down in their Volvo. It's a scruffy brown 240 with a hole in the exhaust and they rest their arms out of the windows while they're on their phones. I walked down to the supermarket and back and they passed me 14 times, like youths everywhere.



I'm going to oil Molly's chain at 11.30pm, because I can.

June 16th,
Thursday, AM.

I don't know what the time is. If I remember the point at which



the horizon shielded us from the sun for a few minutes last night, and assume that to be north, the sun is about 1/4 way round the horizon from there now, so it must be 6.00AM. It didn't get even slightly dark.

My washing dried in the sunshine last "night" and it's hot now. There's no condensation on the tent. I'm going to go on about this because I'm amazed by it.

Of course it's been the same for millions of years but the reason life on this planet is like it is, is because of just this



phenomenon. It's difficult to imagine the geometry of the solar system down South. In six months time it'll be $-20/30^{\circ}\text{C}$ here and they won't have seen the sun for weeks.

Hopefully we'll get to Jokkmokk today which is just North of Pol Cirkeln. The town has the best museum of Sami culture in Sweden. I should be interested but I'm not particularly. Sami culture is because they live up here, on top of the planet, where the sun goes round very slowly, or rather they do. Up here the planet's surface is much closer to its spin axis. The radius of the circle they spin in is much smaller. It still takes 24 hours to go round once but because their circumference is smaller, their speed in miles per hour is less.

You can try to imagine that all you like in Norfolk but it doesn't make sense until you've felt the need to press on because you think it's 10.00PM but actually it's only 6.30. Sometimes it feels like tea time then you notice everyone else has gone to bed.

After I've seen the sun all day, when it's night time in Loddon I'll think of where the sun is, or rather where I am. In the middle of the night on December 21st, I'll be looking straight out into the ultimate bleakness of deep space, the furthest I'll ever be from the sun. At mid day on June 21st, I'll be closest. I don't think flying up here on an aeroplane would work. You have to ride across the planet's surface and to feel that, you need a motorcycle. Being trapped in a little tin box or isolated in a gold fish bowl camper van isn't it.

June 16th, Thursday, PM, Jokkmokk, or 3km outside it, $66^{\circ}37'$ North. Record high 34°C in July, record low -46°C in January. 29,061 miles.

Jokkmokk Market has been taking place since 1605. On the first Thursday in February every year, thousands of people gather in the town for concerts, exhibitions and trade in one of the most important social events for the Sami people. Temperatures during the festival can drop as low as -40°C .

As usual there's a big sign on the way in, "Jokkmokk Camping Centre". You just know what that's going to be, a big car park, a security barrier and a painfully pretty blonde receptionist who'll greet you in English because she saw the GB plate on the CCTV. She'll say "196SEK please."

However tonight there's a choice, 95SEK for a pitch on a farm down the road a bit.

We'll have two nights and a day off to celebrate our arrival in The Arctic. I took some pictures of Molly on the South side of the imaginary line which makes mathematical, geometric sense of the rhythm of life on this planet. Now we're really on holiday.

On the sign in the picture right, it says "The Arctic Circle's position is defined by the inclination of the earth's axis, which varies under the influence of the sun, the moon and the planets. During a period of 40,000 years the Arctic Circle moves Southwards and Northwards within



and area 180km wide. During a period of 18.6 years, it also moves within an area 570m wide. The Arctic Circle will reach its Northernmost position in the year 12,000, return here in 22,000, to reach its Southernmost position in 32,000 and so forth." On the ground the Circle is marked by a line of white painted stones either side of the road, which presumably someone has to move occasionally to keep up.

Molly had another good day. In places the pine trees thinned out and there was room on the ground for some boggy grassland. We could almost see some scenery. I had all day to cover just 100 miles. I let her rattle along gently past rivers crashing over rock strewn rapids and mirror smooth lakes, shining in the clear, bright sunlight. It's drier up here and that soggy light green moss has gone crispy. Sometimes it's even almost dusty!

I've seen loads of birds I've never seen before and huge, brightly coloured, fast flying flies. They're very loud and make any roadside stop quite a hectic experience. The

dense clouds of mosquitos have reached a new intensity. Standing still is a severe test of endurance. They fly round your hands when you try to do anything and in front



of your eyes when you're trying to see it. The tent has to be zipped up at all times so that when it all gets too much to bear there's still somewhere to hide.

We're surrounded by pine trees here so we can't see the sun at night. This will be more comfortable. You know how hot it is in a tent during the daytime? It's like that all night too if you don't camp in the shade.

June 17th, Friday.

Most of these campsites have a kitchen, kök round here. The families are in the kitchen in the evening with pots and pans and proper food. Almost everything I own is to make sure Molly gets round OK. I walked into town and had a look round the shops thinking "Can I afford that, can I carry this?" I can't have anything squishy or perishable. Domesticity is one of my challenges. Traveling's hard work really, having done it is lovely. The harder it is, the cooler the achievement. That should apply to housework, but it doesn't.

Camped next to me is an Austrian. He's got a Suzuki V-Strom. I'm sure he cruised effortlessly for 1,000km yesterday. I wonder how long he'll keep it for. I'm sure the marketing men will make him want something else. He looks like a well sorted, management sort of bloke, he can afford it.

Actually the Sami museum is fascinating, more of an insight into what happens when the sun doesn't shine all night. Today its 22C. Of the hundreds of old photos in the museum, there are none of the traditional Sami way of life in shirt sleeves. It's all ice, snow, hunting, fishing, ice, snow, reindeer herding, ice, snow, living in furs and ice and snow. Summer up here is only two weeks long.

Pictured right is stuffed elk in the Sami museum. Elk is Scandiavian for moose. These things are huge and it's a privilege to see one from the road. Incidentally I haven't seen much fruit and vegetable growing. I suppose in order to eat dinner, you have to outwit it first.



In North Africa you meet people with all the gear and "Trans Sahara" plastered all over their Unimog, in Tangier city centre. There are some of those here. A huge overland truck with 5' tall wheels, whining gearboxes and an almighty, smoking diesel engine caused a snarl up in Jokkmokk's only main road. It even had a motorcycle in a rack on the back. I noticed I wasn't alone in

thinking “Where on earth are they going with that?” It was very clean and shiny. It made me smile to see it had Swiss registration plates. Army knife syndrome!

Which way next? Kautokeino sounds good. Having been there you’d go to Karasjok along route 92 which crosses an area on the map which isn’t green. Does that mean no pine trees? I like that idea. Karasjok is in Norway, in the wrong place. A far neater and fuel efficient route to the end of Western Europe would be through Kittilä and Inari, straight to Kirkenes. That way is another 450 miles of pine trees but worse, today, tomorrow and Sunday are the midsummer shut down in Finland. In the guide book it says don’t try to travel, Finland is shut.

Plan A is to go to Pajala, 150 miles away and on the border with Finland. The map says it has a campsite and there’s a dot in the town symbol, so it might be big enough to have a proper petrol station instead of an automatic one. I avoid these because I’m not sure they’ll take English cards. I’m also not sure I’ve left enough in the bank to cane it with the card too much. I won’t need to buy petrol in Finland where it’s expensive if it’s a real, inhabited station.

June 18th, Saturday, 29297 miles.

I changed my mind on the road because the weather looked good this way. We’re in Finland, somewhere called Enontekiö, 65° 23’ North. It’s been a blinder of a day.

I met John the Irishman on the campsite in Jokkmokk. We left at different times this morning but met on the road. We had a cup of coffee by the roadside and rode the rest of the way here together. He’s gone on to Alta, in a hurry to get to Nordkapp. Five years ago he was in Norway but didn’t make it and it’s been nagging at him ever since. He spent too long partying in Denmark and ran out of time. He said “Yeah I know.” When I told him I’d heard Nordkapp was nothing, but he just had to go. People do. We filled up our petrol tanks at the last station in Sweden, it’s cheaper than Finland in the Euro zone, at €1.67 per litre.

Even this far North it’s still 17C in the evening. The weather has been amazing,



which is the reason for the mosquitos apparently. People are wearing nets over their heads. North of Jokkmokk is proper Lapland. The pine trees are smaller and less dense because it's rocky and the countryside is rolling hills.

Imagine the Hollywood road movie, when the renegade and the heroine pull into some outback gas station/diner in the middle of nowhere. It's windy, parched and ominously remote. You don't get tumbleweed in Northern Finland but the rest is the same. It looks like no one's around, the radio's on, an oily bloke in dungarees watches you walk in and you feel like you shouldn't be there. I only wanted a loaf of bread. Nope, not on Sunday.

I walked into Enontekiö to see if the supermarket I'd heard about was open. Two jewelled chavs cruised up next to me in their stupid, blinged up car with Norwegian plates on it.

Down slid the window. "Do you speak English?" "Yes." "Is there a shop?" I gestured down the road in the direction I was walking in. "It's shut." they said. I offered them the gas station I'd found. "Is that all there is?" they asked. As far as I knew it was. "Thank god for Finland." they said and drove off. I thought "You bastards!" on Finland's behalf.



I was beaten to most of this campsite by a bus load of punters from a "Camp in the Arctic" tour company. They were English, Australian and Kiwi. We got into a chat about what I was up to and I ended up giving a lecture on what I think, until 11.30pm when we suddenly realised it was 11.30pm. In the morning they said they enjoyed it. Really?

June 19th, Sunday, 29447 miles,
Karasjok, 69°30' North.

According to the internet, prior to the early 1700s there was nothing here. Now, the Sami parliament of Norway is located in the village. There's a thing called The Sami Park where you can buy everything you need to dress up like one.

During WW2, one of four concentration camps in Northern Norway was built here. This one, staffed by the SS, held 374 prisoners, mostly from Yugoslavia.



They were tasked with road building which cost the lives of all but 111 of them within a few months. 45 were shot later, for some reason.

Karasjok, well inland and high, holds the record for the lowest ever recorded temperature in Norway, -51c. This is the coldest part of Western Europe. Summers are short, the lowest recorded temperature for April is -33c and for May it's -17c. However, high summer can be blistering hot with no night time. The record being 31.7c in June 1972 and again in July 2018. Temperatures fall significantly in August.

Up here, the road signs are in Sami as well as Finnish or Norwegian. The guide book says of Kautokeino that its population consider Sami to be



their first language. What both of them? It's a lot like North Wales for that.

Did I mention the weather? Astonishing! Around Kautokeino the pine trees stopped. Melted snow has soaked into the ground so almost everywhere is bogs and lakes. There's white water crashing along by the roadside and it's all lit up by a brilliant sun. The air temperature is not hot, around 17c but the sunshine is fierce, because the air is so clear?

Above the water table the ground is sandy. It looks and feels hot, dry and dusty and oddly a lot like Spain! Each little outpost of houses and cabins has temporarily redundant snowmobiles



covered in dust. Even Molly is dusty. This weather is a rare treat, we'll go for the end of the world tomorrow in the hope it will last for another few days, for Kirkenes or Grense Jakobselv, a few yards beyond which lies the impenetrable, mysterious land of the Russians. That involves a short trip back into Finland. Norwegian petrol by the way is 15KR, £1.90 a litre (in 2011), not just because it's Norwegian but because it's

North
Norwegian.

Parked next to reception on flat tyres is a Ural outfit. It doesn't look like it works but it's nice to see. Sometimes you know when you've come to the



right place. I suppose this close to Russia itself, there must be a few escapees. Are there many mosquitos up here? They drown in hundreds in your tea, they stick to your dinner, they land in and on everything and make a moment's peace impossible. You can't sit down or stand still for a second because they fly into your eyes or up your nose. There's no escape from their constant high pitched whine. All the kids on this campsite are wearing hats with nets over their faces. At least there's the TV room with a door to keep the menace out. Free camping is legal up here but the TV room is worth the site fee alone. I feel really tired now. Too many late "nights".

June 20th, Monday, 29658 miles. We're waiting for the sun at the end of the Western World, Grense Jakobslev, 69°47' North.

It's been another crystal clear, bright blue skied day. We're happy that the fog won't roll in off the Barents Sea and we'll be able to watch June 20th become June 21st with no punctuation, demarcation or hint of influence from the human concept of daily time. The longest day doesn't mean an awful lot without a night time at each end.



There are several others here who've set up their almighty lenses on the rocks pointing out to sea. At present its getting on for tea time but there's already been some discussion about which rock to stand on. One has a white painted steel peg in it. What's that for?

Rain is forecast for around lunch time tomorrow. According to the Norwegian Army, who checked us out, it was foggy last night so clear weather, tonight of all nights, up here, is a whole stack of bonuses. We were warned in perfect English, to treat the border with respect, by a polite Norwegian soldier who explained that the high profile military activity later would be because of an exercise, nothing to be alarmed by. By the way Kirkenes has road signs in Cyrillic script and Russians everywhere. There's a Russian consulate of which the travel guides say "For something like help....."

My tent's in a dip in the dunes out of the wind and the plan is to take some pictures as the sun bottoms out above the horizon. Some people are installed on the rocks above the tiny harbour with a barbeque and beer.

Down South, even if you stay up all night, you still walk home as the sun rises and it feels like a new day. Here, it wont. The next dawn, in the Southern latitude sense is in mid July. I can't shake off the feeling I have to get the camp set up in time because it's going to get dark soon. No it isn't, not for weeks.

Right, the ridge of rocks along the horizon is in Russia. Don't you dare even think about it! Below is as close as the two countries get. The yellow post is in Norway, the green and red banded one is Russian. Are there Russians in the bushes over the fence?



Below, next page, Midnight Molly, on the harbour slipway at Grense Jakobslev, 00.01am 21/06/2012. The closest she's been to Russia for 31 years.

There's some doubt when



midnight actually is. We're further east than Finland but Finnish time is one hour ahead. No one's watch shows the same time.

Northern Finland, that bit which sticks up between Norway and Russia, is lovely.

Brilliant blue skies, brilliant green pine trees and just brilliant everything. Then you ride into Norway and the first thing you come to is the rapids where the Naatamojoki, in Northern Sami, river dumps millions of gallons of melt water into Varangerfjorden. It's Norway's third

most productive salmon fishing river. After that it's fjords, distant snow caps, fishing villages and scenery, scenery, scenery!



June 21st ,Tuesday, 29782 miles, Tana Bru, 70°18' North.



On paper the population is a little over 700 but just like most of these little outposts. Not many people seem to actually live here. There's a hotel/campsite, a petrol station/car repair shop, a supermarket, a bus station, a bank, a cafe and a couple of tourist shops but only a few houses. I think the population is spread all over the

countryside in those pretty painted cabins dotted around the hillsides, lakes and fjords and the dot on the map is just a commercial centre.

Bru means bridge in Norwegian, the road bridge being Tana's most obvious and most photographed feature. The original bridge was destroyed during the liberation of Northern Norway by the Soviets in 1944, who luckily went home afterwards.

People look different here. That blonde Nordic thing has gone. Northern Finland is like this too. The locals look like they've married their sisters, bless them. The women don't look much, having ridden up through Sweden, a tough act to follow.

We got away with the weather last night for the midnight sun photos but it's raining now. Reception girl at the campsite said Thursday is going to be hot. I asked how hot. 17c! The Samis will be breaking into a sweat in that. I relayed the info to an Italian I met briefly. He rode away on his BMW laughing. "I'm from Italy" he said, "40c is hot."

Blokes in dungarees and base ball caps drive pick up trucks. They go hunting and fishing. They're swamp men. It's like the Wild West, it even has Country and Western music.

I went to sleep this afternoon, because it doesn't really matter when you do. I missed the worst of the rain and thought I'd adjust Molly. She's developed a lot more piston noise and snatching and pinging on a light throttle. Normally that's because the ignition's wandered advanced. After 3,000miles it would, it does that. But it could be E10 alcoholic petrol, all there is in Norway. Even after a siesta I'm tired but it's not a disappointing inability to get things done, it's a sleepy, mellow self satisfaction. It's lovely.

There's a TV in the lounge in the hotel here which shows looped footage from the Hurtigruten as a sort of screen saver. The Hurtigruten is the cruise ship which goes up and down Norway constantly. It's not just a cruise ship but a vital communication link, easier than a coast road interrupted by a hundred ferry crossings. I watched a bus load of English people who took a bus from Honingsvåg to Nordkapp. They all thought it was marvellous although they could hardly see each other through the fog. Grense Jacobselv was definitely the place to be last night.

It's a wonder the island of Magerøya doesn't sink with the weight of punters herded onto it. I met a young English bloke in Karasjok who comes up here lots. "It's like Land's End in Cornwall." he said. Should I bother with a lunge northward for that last half degree in latitude?

We've had some big scenery today. I took some pictures of it while the sun was shining. The wind has been swirling round the mountains so one minute Molly's been blown down to 2nd gear up the steep bits, then round the next corner she's

been swept along by the almighty spinnaker that is the pack.

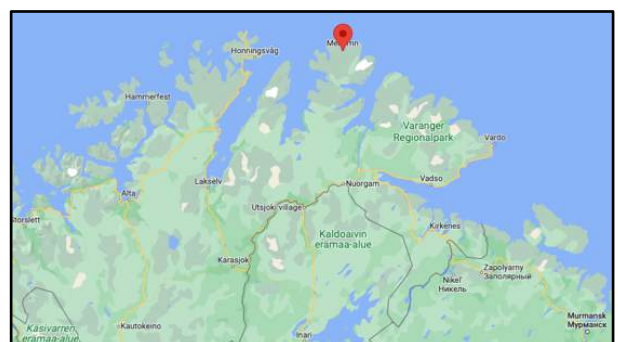
June 22nd,
Wednesday,
29933 miles,
Mehamn, 71°02' 08" North. Those last 08" are important because we took a ride to Gamvik this afternoon.

Gamvik is the northernmost settlement on the European mainland at

71°02' 28" North. It's a king crab fishing village and it stinks like it. Why on earth anyone would want to live up here defeats me. Even in the midsummer sunshine it's bleak. There's a crab fishing museum, the harbour and a handful of pretty painted wooden houses, next page top, and for that remote, last outpost, end of the world feeling it's spectacular. It says "Gamvik Museum 71° N", on the museum, proudly. You can stick Nordkapp up your tour bus.

Some people, even up here, have American cars and Harleys, even though the cruising strip is 300 yards long and there's only 5 people to cruise past. Whatever must it be like to live here so isolated. Everyone speaks perfect English with an American accent, that'll be Hollywood then.

Route 98 from Tana to Ifjord runs through open moorland still partially covered in melting snow. For some reason it doesn't have a green line on the map but it's still stunningly beautiful, hundreds of square miles of bogs, lakes, ice, snow and water running everywhere. When you turn North to



Mehamn, the little bog plants stop and it's just rocks and weird shapes and forms cut into the snow by the meltwater. It's immense, the feeling of open spaceness is so intense you feel almost scared to be alone in it.



The whole day has been lit up in brilliant sunshine. Little Sony Snapshot photos aren't going to picture the relentless wind, the colour of the water or the pristine whiteness of the snow, or the feeling of desolation up here. Picture No 32 is what Gamvic looks like in the summer sun. Imagine it pitch black for weeks and encased in feet thick ice. Luckily, because it's by the sea, the average daily maximum temperature in December is almost as high as -1°C . The average daily minimum is -4°C .

We're camped on a little piece of rocky bog overlooking Mehamn, right, out of the wind and it's hot, at more than 71°



North! The row of red huts in the picture are for guests and the brown building is the clubhouse for what would be the campsite if there was such a thing. To get here I rode past yet another "town" a dot on the map called Ifjord. It has road signs to tell you how to get there but all I found was an automatic petrol station and a cafe. My English card worked in the single petrol pump. I had to wait my turn while someone with a pick up truck filled 15 jerrycans, praying there'd be some left.

A whaling station was established here in 1885, which pissed off the local fishing community. It was believed that the whales chased the fish towards the shore where they were easy to catch, but the whaling reduced the whale population so much there weren't enough to do this.

On Whitsunday 1903, 2,000 fishermen from along the coast gathered in the harbour to protest. At the time the population of Mehamn was only 123. The tension generated boiled over a little later when the manager of the whaling station couldn't see why he should bother helping a fishing boat, floundering at sea with a broken helm. On June 2nd, the angry fishermen wrecked the whaling station. Mehamn's only policeman stood watching while the factory's machinery was destroyed and its chimneys torn down in a two day frenzy of resentment.

By the time the army arrived from Vardø, almost 200 miles away, the deed was done. Some of the protesters were caught but by the time they were convicted in court, the political climate in Norway had changed and the whaling industry was subjected to the regulation necessary to preserve whale stocks. No whaling station in Mehamn was then considered a good thing and the fishermen became heroes, suffering only light sentences for their contribution to the greater good.

On March 11th 1982, a De Havilland Canada Twin Otter crashed into the sea on the approach to Mehamn's tiny airport. It was Mehamn's only ever air crash despite two flights in and out daily.

Just so you know, here's what Mehamn looks like in winter, right.



Tomorrow we go south for the first time since the M20 in Kent six weeks ago, and latitude no longer matters.

June 23rd, Thursday,
30128 miles,
Russenes,
70° 29' north.

Yesterday the weather going up the Nordkinn peninsula was windy and bright, today it was grey and deathly still, wet and misty. The air is dense and bird calls come from a mile away. You can



hear water crashing and the light's an eerie gloom. I rode at 30mph to make it last longer, with my visor up to feel it, vast open space. I could see distant mountains lit up in the sun. They might be picture postcard Norway but the Northern latitude atmosphere's up here. You don't get this in the goldfish bowl of a camper van.



A little further down the road the bog plants reappeared with grazing reindeer. I could smell moorland. There were lots of bird calls I've never heard before with no idea what made them. I wouldn't know what they were if I did see them. There was an owl up on the plateau. I shared my little lump of bog in Mehamn with a pair of tiny black and white birds.

Outside this campsite the oyster catchers fly round in circles before landing in the road. They slow the traffic to a crawl by doing their broken wing dance, accompanied by frantic, anguished squawking. They must have nests nearby.

The bog plants form a squishy carpet of lush foliage with little coloured flowers 3 or 4" high. If I was a botanist I'd be wildly excited by them. For me they're just exciting as an Arctic thing.

Despite the sunshine on the horizon, the weather stayed cloudy and grey as I rode west. Lakselv doesn't have a campsite although the map says it should, however the big surprise is the end of my lovely peaceful outback tour. Here route 98 joins the E6, the route up Norway.



Suddenly there are queues of camper vans, BMW GS1200s with aluminium boxes and the tour buses. Then it rained hard.

Russenes Camping is at the bottom of the E69 to Nordkapp, which branches off the E6. All the way from Grense Jakobselv the tarmac's been patchy, if there was any, and the road not much more than an English country lane, often single track. From Lakselv the tarmac is immaculate and tour bus friendly. All those stories about 50 to 100 tour busses a day are just stories right? It can't be that bad can it? Well it is! Pictured right is what you do here, bless 'em.



This site has cabins, caravans and a hotel. There's a gift shop full of trolls (for sale) and all the busses stop here, 4, 5 or 6 at a time, constantly, all day and night. You can't move in the gift shop and the camp site toilet is welcome relief for hundreds of bursting bus tourers who queue for hours in desperation. There's motorcycles, bicycles, cars and campers all passing through on their way to Nordkapp because whichever way you came up here, there's only one way to go further, if the oyster catchers let you.

Molly gets her picture taken lots here. It used to be just the odd East German who owned an MZ in his Soviet youth, who we happened to meet in a petrol station. Now it's bus loads of Japanese tourists. I've had chats in lots of accents with people from all around the world, all of whom took pictures and asked "What is it?" Telling them "IZH" doesn't help. I met a Russian in Kirkenes who asked. I told him "Сделано в России" because I know how to say that. "OK!" he said laughing.



I show people where Gamvic is on the map, to explain why I'm not going to join them at Nordkapp. It's not quite as far up but even the bus tourers can see, getting there yourself, on Molly, is infinitely cooler. I've not seen anyone photograph a BMW yet, except the bloke who owned it of course.

Relics of times past, pictured next page. There are lots of these peacefully rusting away. These were the only source of power up here before Norway's national grid

spread this far. Right is a single cylinder open crank Deutz diesel, 1930s maybe, as a wild guess. Did the Wehrmacht bring it with them? Older still, a two stroke, deflector pistoned beauty I'd loved to have brought home and cherished. The reason it's still here is because it weighs a ton and no one's interested enough to bother with carrying it further South, where the infrastructure exists to give it value. Up here it's just junk.



Bottom is an insight into the perils of living in a Scandinavian wooden house. Note the car with the paint burned off, still in what's left of the garage. Imagine standing outside, in the road, watching your life burn.



June 24th Friday, 30209 miles, Alta, 68° 58' North.

Alta is much bigger than I thought it would be, once I discovered most of it is underground. Next page top is what the town centre looks like above ground. My guidebook jokes that it looks like an office park, but I think it looks a bit like Belgium. It's a typical Arctic summer day today, cold, windy and grey. All the scenery has a lid of cloud on it. It's not raining but it feels like it could anytime. There seems to be no one around because the keen wind keeps people hurrying from one building to the next. Then when you go underground, through the



automatic double doors of the air locks which keep the winter out, you find all the bright young Norwegians are snuggled up in the warm having a lovely time with their expensive currency. All urban social life is under what looks like a bunch of industrial units.



Away from the centre there's industry, housing estates and so on. I thought I'd walk round this afternoon but the other end is too far, so I rode round. Molly is horrible without the weight of the pack. The suspension's too hard, the steering's too steep and there's not enough weight to soak up the power. Most of Alta is 30 or 40kph speed limits, right in the hole where my home made carb needle is worse on E10, ethanol impaired Norwegian petrol, halfway between 2nd and 3rd gear.



However the ride here this morning was gorgeous. After the rain the sunshine was lovely. That first two hours is prime time. The thrill of having got away with yet

another ride on a Russian motorcycle at the end of it is wonderful. The time between being able to get going again when everything's packed up, and beginning to feel you've ridden far enough is the sweet spot. I can even forget about mosquitoes for a while. Sadly, I'm narrow minded enough to think that even ancient rock carvings aren't that good. Alta museum is a world heritage site and seems to be built around some heritage I feel I ought to look at. However I just want to ride through the scenery, that's all, that's the point. That's why doing this doesn't work in a car. When I stopped to take a shot of Molly, some bloke stopped too and offered to take a picture of me with her. I didn't want him to. We fell out over it. After he'd got back in his car, slammed the door and tore off in a shower of wheel spun stones, I thought perhaps I should have let him do it, but would he have tore off with my camera then?

I've seen hundreds of cyclists, pumping along the E6 when it's 150km from anywhere at all. That's heroism. If your thing is bicycles, then you're condemned to pedalling and the tiniest of flimsy, basic camping kit. Lots of people do that, but hardly anyone does it in cars.

Pictured right is midnight on the campsite in in Alta. Gloomy, grey skies threatening rain all day, bright sunshine to bask in all night. Sleep? Sort of.



By the way Alta has the Northernmost ice hotel in Europe

even though for the Arctic, the climate is mild. A yearly average precipitation of only 16.5", with frequent clear skies, makes it a hot spot for watching the Northern Lights in winter.

June 26th, Sunday, 30,399 miles,
Skibotn, 69° 23' North.

Today's ride has been spectacular. After we (me and Molly) left Alta the scenery was quite nice, a bit grey and gloomy in the low cloud but still nice. Then it started to get big and high as the weather closed in. We went up into the fog well above the snow line. I could see the tops of mountains and



big jagged lumps of rock poking out of the tops of clouds. It got cold and rained but I could still see for miles. At the top the atmosphere was amazing, swirling mist and huge dark rock faces with patches of snow.



Going down the other side, the weather improved and the scenery changed to full on fjords all the way here. No sunshine, still low cloud and grey, but the light made the mountains look imposing and majestic rather than pretty and picturesque. We followed the edge of one fjord where the rock faces fell sheer into the sea with snow still stuck in the cracks. You don't get colours in moody weather. The fjords don't look nice, they look dangerous but impressive just the same.



Skibotn campsite is at the water's edge, or in it when the tides in. I went for a stroll over the mudflats which is all strange bird calls, seaweed and shellfish. There are bands of different plants which grow in the water, in the water sometimes and out of the water, a very exciting graded habitat. According to the map in the kitchen here, that almighty lump of rock opposite the site, on the other side of the water is 1,500m high. There's a cold wind blowing down the fjord which means the mosquitoes can't land. WooHoo!

The mountains round the site are so close and so high that there's absolutely no

chance at all of a midnight sun here. I'll be in bed early then.

Skibotn has a population of around 500, mostly Sami descendants, once including Leonhard Seppala, the dog sled racing legend. Apparently the climate is dry and mostly cloud free, just not now I'm here. The clear

skies make it perfect for the situation of an astrophysical observatory, important for determining the nature of heavenly bodies.



June 27th, Monday, 30582 miles, Ballangen, 68° 18' North.

This is a bit south of Narvik on the E6. When I left Skibotn this morning the cloud base was so low you'd never know the mountains existed. It was cold, greyer than ever and raining. Then patches of blue gave way to unbroken sunshine. Soon I had to take my plastic skin off because it was too hot and by the time I arrived here, it was blistering, in an Arctic sort of way. Now the scenery is lit up and the blue sky is reflected by the water to make it the colour it should be.

I was expecting a wet and wearying ride. With mountains you just never know. As a part of my loose planning I thought I might try the Lofoten Islands but I changed my mind after a few kilometres of



the E10. I'm sure they're beautiful but they're out on a limb. They're not on the way home and judging by how today has been, the E6 looks like it's going to be several hundred miles of jaw dropping scenery anyway.

Midnight sun again tonight? It could skim the top of the mountains on the North side of Ototfjorden. The view from this campsite is lovely in every direction. Distant

snow caps, crystal clear, blue water on two sides and wooded hillsides with thundering melt water on the others. This afternoon I climbed up to where I could see a waterfall from my tent. Even though it's probably only a couple of hundred metres from the E6, there's so much water crashing down so fast you can't hear the infrequent traffic.

Molly didn't burst into life with her usual enthusiasm this morning and hasn't quite been herself for a couple of days. I think we might have a foreign body in the carb, Swedish, Finnish or even Belgian. Something's changed.

We left Norfolk with a rebuilt engine which has now settled down. I discovered the nipple on the end of the throttle cable was holding the throttle open. Now Molly is looser I wanted to turn the throttle stop out but filed the end off the nipple instead. While I was filing I had a go at the needle. Last year, the Chang Jiang suffered from the same breathless gasping going uphill, and pinking and banging on the overrun. There's lots of alcohol in Norwegian petrol and a lot of Norway is uphill. I filed the needle taper to give us a bit more gas at about a third open.

I did this late at night in the sunshine. Someone from one of the camper vans came over, because Molly is always a talking point. He was a Dutchman and asked me if she was an IZH. He told me he had a friend in Holland who had one. "A Planeta Sport like this?" I asked. It was. I told him I knew Robert Hoffman, who's Dutch and owned a Planeta Sport. "Yeah that's him!" Amazing.

In this part of Norway the E6, the only road up and down, is frequently interrupted by fjords. There's no road round these because they protrude inland so far. Ferries are the only way across. The day's ride to Ballangen had three.

Since the 17th century, mining has been important here, copper, nickel, zinc, iron, manganese and lead. How arduous is that? Ballangen has the highest rate of sick leave from work in Norway.

Camper vans are a thing. There must be some sort of camper van party on this site. I had to camp next to some buildings and



wasn't allowed near the huge empty field which seemed to be available when I turned up. Then they came rolling in, three or four at a time and reserved spaces for their friends around themselves. They must be a camper van club, from Germany, and all driven up together, unfortunately some of these things are huge.



I wave to probably 20, 30 or 40 BMW GS1200s everyday but I must meet 10 times that number of big, white, shiny, offensively ugly camper vans. Maybe Nordkapp isn't the point, camper vans are.

I met an Italian who shook his head in disbelief. He slapped me on the back and waved his arms at Molly like you'd expect an Italian to do. "Bravo!" he cried. He didn't speak English but he didn't have to. Lovely, lively reception girl, when I said "Jeg snakker ikke Norsk", said "You're in Norway, everyone speaks English." Embarrassingly that includes all the Germans, Dutch, French and even Finns. Us foreigners all talk about the cost of everything in Norway in English because it's remarkable. That's why the Germans bring all their food with them in their camper vans.

June 28th, Tuesday, 30735 miles, where are we?

Today was the inverse of yesterday. A start in glorious sunshine then wet. The new needle profile was definitely an improvement until we needed a long, steep climb out of a village with a 50kph speed limit. Molly wouldn't pull 3rd gear with no run up so we were stuck with 30mph in 2nd, for two miles. She complained about that for most of the rest of the day, until it rained hard and cooled her down.

Even though we're still in the Arctic, the rain was hot. I had to shed layers inside my waterproofs. It stopped just in time to get my tent up dry but it's very close and humid.

Today we've enjoyed a 20 minute ferry crossing, 4 bridges and I've lost count of the tunnels we went through, the longest of which was 3km. Inside the tunnels the air is cold. When you burst out the end, everything steams up. Molly got water in her carb. I don't think it's rain, I think it's condensation.

Today's big thing is Elk. There was one standing in the road with two little ones.

Little ones? They were as big as a horse. Dad turned to look as I swept round the corner, spreading antlers across the road. I stopped and watched awestruck as he waited for the young ones to scramble over the roadside fence. The second tripped, panicking in order to catch up with its sibling and fell flat on its face. If I'd tried to get the camera out I'd have wasted the opportunity to look at them. All over Norway there are "Watch out for Elk" signs. I thought they were for reindeer which wander about on the road and have no traffic sense at all, but they're not. Meeting an Elk is a special treat.

By late evening the atmosphere here was lovely, warm, with patches of blue sky and beginning to dry out. It's what my friend Lizzie calls "soft". The view from my fjord side tent is lovely too. Clear still water, mountains, fishing boats, pretty wooden houses in the trees and of course fluorescent, incandescent, brilliant pearl white camper vans.



June 29th, Wednesday, 30880 miles, a little further north than Mosjøen, 66°north.

We crossed the Arctic Circle today, just South of the Saltpfjellen National Park which the E6 goes through. We are now back in The South again where it will get something like dark at night. The last few hundred miles have made a difference and the angle of the sun is noticeably steeper. It'll crash into the horizon in a dive tonight instead of just glancing off it.

It's a lot greener down here. There's grazing live stock and farming, and hay fever again. We were underground for 8.6km, the longest tunnel yet. And, such a sweet relief, no more mosquitoes!

The bulk of Saltpfjellen is up in the mountains and there's a huge car park, Picture No 56, where you can leave your vehicle and go pack backing in the wilderness. Apparently not many people do. I parked Molly in it to give you some idea of scale.

Most people seem to fly past in their camper vans at 70mph, him driving, her

reading a book, both insulated from the wonderful world outside by their goldfish bowl windscreens.

Nothing had dried out much overnight in the humidity so I set off this morning into another grey day with wet gloves, wet boots, wet overalls and damp everything else.

I put the tent away wet because it rained later in the night and within a few miles we were

climbing into the clouds and more rain. After fiddling with Molly's carb she was purring like a chainsaw and the whole event, riding a Soviet two stroke round Scandinavia, wet, was quite simply life enhancing.

I might be odd but I'd rather do this, pictured right, than this, pictured below it. It's Polar Cirkelen, as they call it here. Note the car park rammed with camper vans. I didn't stay long, I didn't really want to buy a little plastic troll to put on the dashboard.

I know it was raining and the scenery would have looked spectacular if the sun was shining but we're in moorland, it's always raining because it's always up in the clouds. It was more like it usually is today than ever. At one point I heard thundering water and left Molly



against a tree to go look. If I'd been with anyone I'd have needed to shout above the roar to make them hear me. It's peak meltwater season. Sadly you can't photograph this stuff on a little digital matchbox and I doubt my command of English is good enough either. You have to stand beside the water and feel the ground shake to be aware of how powerful nature is.

I wonder how much experience the camper van and BMW pilots have? I know they get there in smooth, serene comfort but it seems to me they pay to have less fun. Myself and Molly don't have any of the mainstream essentials, we're not dressed up but do we look cool? People take pictures of us.



Does the thrill last so much longer if poverty makes the achievement more personal? There's real art in it then isn't there? I felt that at Polar Cirkelen.

Somewhere, somehow, I was bitten by something. I didn't see what it was. I didn't get bitten hypodermically, with the surgical precision of a mosquito, but savagely, by something with skin ripping teeth. It tore a hole in my left forearm which developed into a hard lump surrounded by a hot, itchy rash.

It rained all night, I packed everything away wet yet again and rode off into yet another day of low cloud and more rain wondering if I was going to have to sleep in a wet sleeping bag, overwhelmed by some hideous insect borne infection. Still it was a joy.



The E6 goes inland for a

while, through hills rather than mountains. Even with no sunshine it all looks very green. Some big rivers have cut steep sided valleys with rapids and slopes covered in pine trees growing at amazing angles, in what? It all looks like rock but obviously it isn't. Apparently these rivers are famous salmon runs and have gift shops and restaurants with panoramic windows so you can watch them jump. More plastic trolls? Yep.

Unlike Sweden, the road goes up and down and twists and turns through the trees. Every now and then there'll be a spectacular view, like when you follow a sharp downhill bend round a rock face and there'll be a wall of pine trees, all stacked up seemingly on top of each other, steaming in the heavy air. Water runs everywhere, everything is dripping and the rocks are covered with moss, bright green in contrast to the dark green pine trees.

Molly isn't effortless. She has a slow action twistgrip so I can find the sweet spot in the complicated relationship between her conflicting parameters. Filing the needle has ironed out some of the less than sweet spots but I still do it all the time. I can avoid changing down if I get it right going uphill. A lot of Norway is uphill. Consequently, a lot of it's downhill too. Molly, just visible in the car park to the left below, is about to go downhill for 25 miles. There's white water rapids in the bottom of the gorge below the car park, which is a beauty spot if it isn't raining.

One of my
campsite
mates picked
up one of the
rucksacks,
interested to
see how heavy
it was. It was
the one with
petrol, water,
and food in it
and not the
heavy one with
two stroke oil,
spanners and
spares. "Christ!" he said. He was German, is that a German word?



We were joined by a German girl on the site last night. I've never seen so much stuff on one motorcycle. She had a camera on top of her helmet and every night she downloaded her little 2GB worth of footage into her laptop, then programmed her next day's ride into her SatNav. She thought everything was beautiful and photographed the rainbow over the lake with her huge digital mega lensed camera, then downloaded that as well.

Most of the reason I'm worried about my insect bite is because she too suffered one on her hand and couldn't ride because she couldn't get her gloves on over the swelling. It took antibiotics to sort it out. While she was grounded she booked a whale watch boat and took pictures of "beautiful" sperm whales off the Lofoten Islands. She said 3 days ago, Nordkapp was only 5c and lashed with driving rain. Oh well, can't win 'em all.

Right, higher than the fog when it wasn't hammering down, a rare respite. Below, level with the upper fog, about to drop back into the ground level fog.

Here's a thing, where are all the Brits? I've seen hundreds of motorcycles, thousands of camper vans and loads of bicycles but only one GB plate, Molly's. I haven't met 10 English people yet. Why's that?

Killer discoveries of the trip so far, Rofa

Applesin Marmalade which only comes in big jars so you have to eat lots of it and Jagerbrod, some sort of fibrous corn bread, I think it says on the bag. Don't get Stubburet Mackerel because the tins are only half full.

July 1st, Friday, Oppdal, 31,226 miles.

Fortunately there's a nice crusty lid on the jagged hole in my arm where my mystery insect did its worst. The raging conflict has not developed further. It feels calmer now thanks to the anti inflammatory effect of antihistamines, I remembered those last night.

Another dull grey, low cloudy start this morning. Most of the time Western Norway



is like this, that's why it's so magnificently green. It's equally magnificently wet. However that's not the reason my boots are falling apart. They're called "Groundworks". Sounds rugged eh? Like the Base Camp camping kit I saw recently, they're made in China. What isn't?

On the approach to Trondheim the E6 turns into a sort of autoroute. It's city traffic. After Trondheim it becomes Trondheim to Oslo, Norway's equivalent of the A1. For the bit of it I was on it follows the River Gaula which has cut several gorges and ravines through the scenery. It's another salmon run and has 113km of fishing available for those maniacs who want it. In some places the sides of the gorges are almost sheer and still covered in the inevitable pine trees clinging onto the rock somehow. The gorges are so deep you can hardly see the river in the bottom. When you can it's only because it's white water over the rocks. Believe it or not, the maniacs were in the river, waist deep in the rain fishing, loads of them.

I didn't take a single picture. The E6 is an endless stream of traffic down here. It twists and turns through the hills with Armco barriers on both sides. It isn't possible to leave Molly leant against the Armco and jump over wherever you like. There's hardly room on the hillsides for the road, never mind tourist space. Laybys never coincide with that spectacular view you noticed out of the corner of your eye as you rode past. Today, the next available turning round space was usually miles away. Then it rained harder and harder as the day progressed. By the time I put the tent up it was hammering down. It's eased off to a steady downpour now, as I write this at 8.30pm. We hope tomorrow will be better because we're on route 70 now, heading into the really big scenery. I'd like to take Molly up Trollstigen on our way to Sognefjord, which I missed last time I was here. Visibility today was awful. It'll be tragic if it doesn't improve in a day or two.

Below, rain falling through steam into the fjord. The town of Andalsnes is on the other side but it takes hours to get there. Humidity? How wet can it get? So far I've been clever in folding the tent up wet, but still preserving a dry bit to sleep on. Everything is damp but not wringing wet, yet. We're going to generate some serious condensation tonight.

Molly on the other hand, is



having a lovely time in the rain. All that cool, wet air to breathe and bucket loads of water splashing all over her cylinder. She ran really sweetly today. Would you believe, after two weeks inside the Arctic Circle, today is the coldest it's been so far. We have lights on at night now but that's mostly to do with the weather rather



than latitude. The ground is still warm even though the air isn't, hence the fog. The trees are steaming. I don't know how high we are but the cloud base is only tens and not thousands of feet above us. There's hardly a breath of wind. Does that mean the pressure's building? Is Norway going to dry out soon? Tomorrow would be good.

July 3rd, Sunday, Andalsnes, 31348 miles.

I think I might be coming down with something, or I'm suffering the consequences of being constantly wet for three days. I had a day off yesterday because the campsite had a clubhouse, so I was only damp when I started out this morning. Condensation is very important here. You would expect the warm air to be above the cold but it isn't. Perhaps the layer of cold acts like a blanket to keep it down. That top level fog is the boundary between the two and riding through it going down fogs up my visor in an instant. Going up through it is quite a bracing shock. The difference is that marked.

Friday's rain was cold and penetrating. I stopped outside Oppdal because I'd had enough, not because there was anything special about the campsite. It was high up above the condensation in cold air, although that wasn't apparent at the time. Within a few yards of leaving, the road went downhill, down and down and down through the condensation layer into the steaming pine trees. My waterproofs got wet on the inside, along with everything else, and hot. The condensation layer is thick enough to produce its own gentle rain. It's a bit like having a shower fully clothed, while riding a motorcycle.

In Andalsnes, having been comfortably drenched on the way this time, as opposed to uncomfortably, we're surrounded by almighty mountains whose snow covered

slopes are only occasionally visible through the clouds of steam. We can't see the peaks ever, they're up in the proper clouds. The locals predict the weather tomorrow will be a bit better, meaning the condensation will rise. It's Trolstiggen tomorrow.

Today we rode through some spectacular scenery, more atmospheric than picturesque because of the gloomy weather. Molly has never run better. It's been absolutely blissful, purring along the edge of fjords, past little harbours, boats, farms, endless parades of distant mountains and constant pine trees sweating steam, all reflected in shiny grey water. We've been up high in the dripping moss and waterfalls as well. It all smells fantastically wet.

After Eresfjord, at the junction to Andalsnes, the sign says 10% for 7km. It twists and turns all the way to the top and every corner reveals another stunning view. Molly ambled up gently in 2nd gear at 20mph, quietly so as not to disturb the ambience, feeling very, very smooth. There was no wind, it was deathly still. You'd feel you'd need to whisper if there was anyone to talk to.

There's some big, heavy bits in a Planeta Sport engine. Molly feels like hers all fit together now. She's developed a lovely, rumble, even, tick over and a soft gentle pick up. I can feel her rattle. I like to listen for a moment before I switch her ignition off. She bounces off compression a few times before she stops. That's how I know everything's spinning freely. She didn't always do that. She used to get agonisingly hot and clank gratefully to a standstill the instant I touched her key.

There was sort of a point to prove. Only an anorak would stay awake while I explained exhaust dimensions and how the port mods enhance the scavenging. Would anyone at all care about the tedious but vital method of gearbox shimming? Everyone's read all the books and soaked up the myths and legends. Tuning means faster doesn't it? Nope! Today, Molly was lovely because I made her like that, precious beyond her doubtful market value in ordinary, boring money.

Right, infinitely more interesting than a BMW.

July 4th Monday morning,
Trollstigen 31361 miles.

I'm writing this at the top of the Trollstigen Pass because it's 'kin unbelievable. Not just spectacular, amazing or breathtaking, it's 'kin unbelievable,



spectacular, amazing *and* breathtaking.

All the mountains around Andalsnes were shrouded in low cloud when I left. There was little visibility low down but I thought I'd leave anyway in case the peaks might poke out through the top. Within a couple of miles the road started to climb, into the same layer of steaming trees and wringing wet moss we enjoyed yesterday, rivers, rocks, water falling everywhere and all of it hot and humid like you wouldn't believe. I get where the troll thing comes from. If trolls lived anywhere they'd live in this swampy, wet, green wonderland. It's so atmospheric.

Then there's the first hairpin bend, then another, then another. Visibility was so bad that I could only sense I was climbing steeply. Millions of gallons of water thunder out of the rocks on either side of the road but I couldn't see enough to tell exactly where from, right.

After I lost count of the hairpins it became suddenly brighter, there were patches of snow obvious through the

grey and a minute after that brilliant blue sky and sunshine. Suddenly there were no trees, just moorland grass and big bald rocks, dry and level with the top of the clouds swirling around the snow caps poking out of the murk we just came from. It's quite a shock to burst into sunlight and it's a completely different place. In the fog, you'd never see it coming.

The road falls away in both directions so this is plainly the top. I'll get back on Molly in a minute and we'll descend once more into the gloom, with no idea what's in it.

Note the tiny people playing in the snow in the tops of the clouds, pictured next page. The view over the edge in the left of the picture on a sunny day would be a bit like the picture below it.

2,500 vehicles pass through here daily peak season. There are 11 hairpins at a gradient of 10% and the top is 2,790' above sea level. Vehicles over 41' long are



prohibited because the hairpins are so tight but in 2011 and 2012, 43' vehicles were allowed as an experiment. I went down here in 2010 on my CJ750 and met several buses coming up, which must have been



the shorter 41' ones. It took most of the day to unravel the blockages. 43'? Stupid idea! This is the densely packed tourist route to Geiranger and there are lots of buses. On October 23rd 2009 the pass was closed by an avalanche after early heavy snowfall.

July 4th Monday, Geiranger
62° north, 31405 miles.

We were in and out of the steam layer several times in the 50 miles we rode to Geiranger which is a jewel even by Norsk standards. Would you like an apparently incongruous comparison with Edale in Derbyshire? Geiranger is isolated, prettier than



anywhere else around it and more of whatever it is that makes the area special, condensed into one small postcard sized space.

All of it is in the end of Geiranger fjord. There's a sharp turn in the fjord which shuts off the open end so it feels like being in a crucible of mountains. It's the essence of Western Norway. Last time I was here, short of time, I rode through. This time I'm camping by the water's edge. There's nowhere else. The sides of the fjord are sheer, 500m high and drop straight down another 300m under the water. According to the info boards in the village, the farmers on the top tethered their children to posts and rocks to stop them falling over the edge.

The campsite opposite the village is built on the rubble brought down by a waterfall

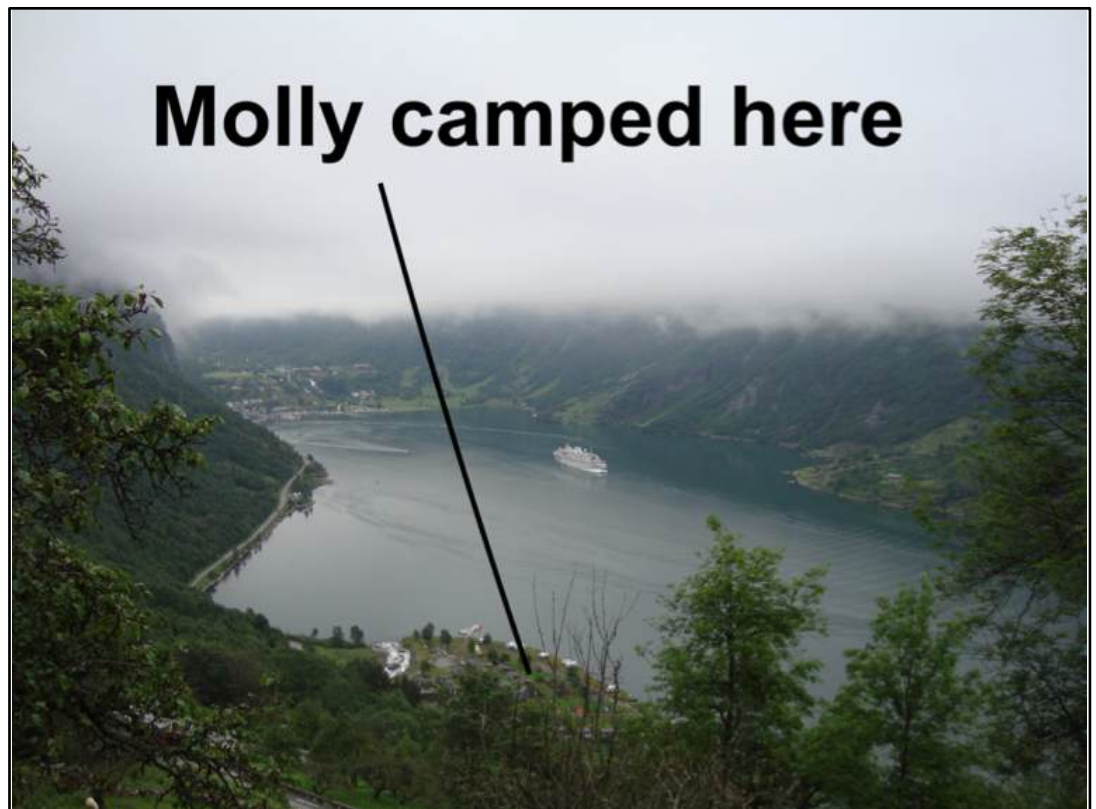
which empties into the fjord beside it. From my tent I can see all of this end of the fjord to the village a mile away up the other end. The village has one street but five hotels and ten campsites. It's the third largest cruise ship terminal in Norway even though only 250 people live here.

All of them work in the tourist industry. 300,000 cruise ship passengers swamp the village each season. There's a car park surrounding a small supermarket and the biggest campervan/tour bus snarl up in Europe. You haven't done Norway until you've been here. All Nordkapp's traffic comes here first. Even so, Geiranger fjord is achingly beautiful, just like Edale. Nordkapp isn't.

The campsite's reception lad was sorry for the state of the pitches after so much rain. "It's a bit wet," he said. Well yeah, it's in Norway, what isn't.

There is no wind, at all. Note vertical diesel smoke pictured next page. The air is so still it carries the sound of crashing water from the waterfalls in the village and the campsite, echoing off the fjord walls. Opposite the campsite the rock face is vertical until it disappears into the steam layer.

Pictured botom is The Cunard Line's Queen Victoria looming past the campsite, through the early morning fog, remarkable

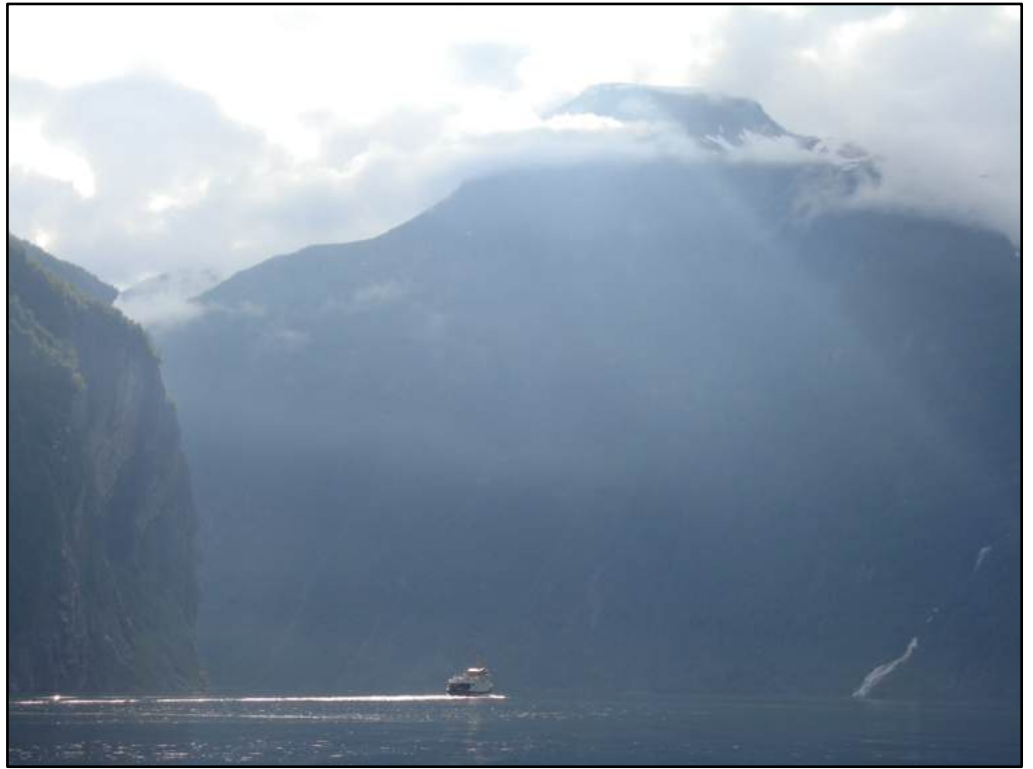


for being so big in such a small space.

July 5th Tuesday,
Byrkjelo, 31493
miles.

For the first time in two weeks my boots are dry! The climb out of Geirangerfjord through the village might be even more dramatic than Trollstigen. A couple of tour buses and a camper van were wedged into a giant coachbuilt Chinese puzzle at the bottom of the climb but they had the grace to let me thread my way through before resuming their struggle.

Within a few hairpins it was up through the clouds again. The viewpoint where everyone takes the definitive shot of the village was almost invisible. After that it was one hairpin at a time, can't see from one to the next, up through the pine trees and the waterfalls. Soon it was more moss than trees, then snow, then no more trees. I passed a stone elevation marker at 800 metres above sea level in thick fog. Then suddenly it got brighter, with patches of blue sky overhead and a towering snow capped peak. Before I could think "bloody hell!" round the next hairpin I was in fierce, hot sunshine under brilliant blue skies with almighty mountain ranges stretching majestically in all directions as far as I could see, thick fog to snowblind in moments, pictured next page.





It really is that bright. Everyone stops every few hundred yards to take it all in. There's so much light. The sky is crystal clear, the snow is brilliant white, the sun comes at you reflected in the water too, which has lumps of ice floating in it but everyone's in shirtsleeves because it's flaming hot.



Then as if that wasn't spectacular enough, there's a series of tunnels which add up to 12km underground with water falling through the roof most of the way, then another series of hairpins with their own snowcapped backdrop to take the road down to sea level. Most of the rest of today's ride went round the end of Nordfjord which is just as relentlessly beautiful as everywhere else in Western Norway, picturesque villages on one side, the Jostedalbreen mountain range on the other, all glowing in the blistering sunshine.

To get to Byrkjelo, in the valley pictured next page top, we had to nip back up to 600 metres above sea level for another few hundred eye



popping views, just to make sure the ride couldn't be anything other than biblically spectacular.

Consequently the camera battery was flat by the time we got here. I had to resort to some roadside editing to save disc space, because a lot of the pictures I took in Sweden look deadly dull now. It's so hot and dry here 90 miles later, two weeks washing dried in two hours.

I have been here before, two years ago on the Chang Jiang, pictured bottom, but I don't remember being blown away like this. I didn't write it down. I only had four days up here and had to be back at work on Monday morning. That's not a life is it? This is the bit of Norway which counts. You need to do the rest, right up north, because it's there in the midnight sun, but this is the bit to come back to. The CJ was very, very slow and hated the heat and Scandinavian petrol. Molly is much better.

Up on the top today I met a German with a bicycle, a titanium, carbon fibre space ship. He had a tripod for his proper camera, to take proper



pictures. His holiday was photographic, around Geiranger. "Where are you going?" he asked. Apart from South I hadn't really thought about it. "You don't know do you?" he laughed.

July 6th, Wednesday, Balestrand, 31649 miles.

While we're on the subject of biblically spectacular, I thought I'd take a look at Sognefjord so I'd go to Førde and start at the seaward end to make a loop out of it. On the way we passed the end of Route 13, which looked a bit more mountainous and had an info board which said it was open, so I took it. We went up over a mountain pass with the usual panoramic views and

I thought that was it. Then we started climbing seriously up into the dwarf birch trees instead of pines, moss covered rocks, grass roofed hunting cabins and another national park. Up high you get a wide open space feeling rather than being hemmed in. There's a distinct difference between lowland, fjord hugging farmland and the big scenery above it. The plants are different, it even smells different.

As the road began to fall we approached a left hand turn with a downhill sign, pictured top. Note "Low gear" in English. I thought "This'll be interesting." and swung Molly between the rocks.

Sorry but I actually did think "‘Fuckin' hell!" Round the turn the road follows the rock face and we were stuck on the side of an immense chasm, looking straight across to the other side with thousands of feet to fall before the bottom. I'm glad



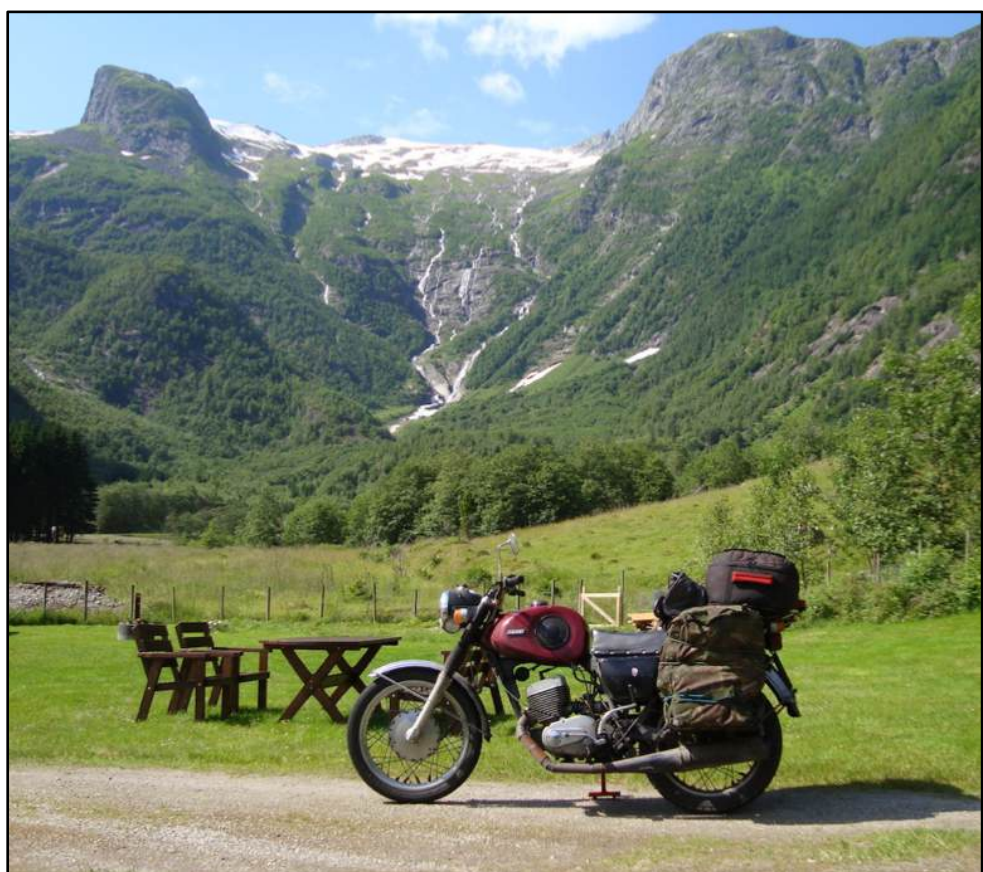
Molly didn't have to go up. This is the descent down into Sognefjord. The skies were blue, it was hot and Sognefjord was just like any other but scaled up for added drama, wider, higher, longer and more complicated. The road is like the line you'd draw round your fingers. The campsite is 3km from Balestrand



up the end of one. I rode to Høyanger, 61° North, thinking I still might like to ride to the open end of the fjord but discovered I didn't. For some reason I felt like I'd like to go home now. Breathtaking though Norway is, I only have so much breath to take, so I turned Molly round and we're on our way back to the E6 and the ride home. Which way though? Over the fjord somewhere and South for the Kristiansand/Hirtshalls ferry? I get to go look at more Denmark like that, somewhere flat for a change.

Høyanger, by the way, was the first industrial town in Norway to be powered by hydroelectricity generated in the surrounding mountains. The big thing here and the need for power is aluminium.

Right is Molly having just arrived at yet another spectacular campsite, near Balestrand.



July 7th, Thursday, Lofthus, 31752 miles.

We're on the edge of Sortfjorden, which is a branch of Hardangerfjord. I didn't consciously make the decision to come this way, I just picked a random ferry ticket at the terminal.

We're still on Route 13, which for awhile was as good South of Songefjord as it was North. A pattern is becoming obvious. Humans mostly live at sea level in their towns, villages and farms. Further North the ground space is devoted to hay, presumably to feed animals in the long winter. Around Hardangerfjord is the first I've seen of fruit trees, growing where it's too steep to farm anything else. Above those it's pines. Higher still the pines give way to dwarf birch trees, bog plants and moorland, that's when Norway changes from picture postcard to wilderness.

Every now and then, this high, there's earth roofed cabins. I think Norwegian blokes have those instead of sheds. Away from the fjords the meltwater gets stuck up there, overflowing in 1,000' waterfalls. Higher still there's not enough soil for trees and it's all



bald rocks and ground hugging, high altitude plants. South of Sognefjord, Route 13 goes up there. Interestingly, going North loses the lower habitats so that Gamvic for example has moorland at sea level. Going North or going up? Same thing. To be honest Norway is only drop dead gorgeous South of Trondheim. Most of the locals I've met down here haven't been that far up, why bother? Latitude's a Southerner's idea of fun.

Today we've enjoyed a 7.5km tunnel, lots of smaller ones, two ferries and sheep, goats and cattle, all on the road. We've forgotten about reindeer and moose now.

Most of the punters on this site are German. There's lots of cars because this is a different holiday to Nordkapp, everyone's in hiking boots. To my left as I sit here looking down the fjord is Hardangervidda which according to my road map is empty space, no roads. Mine is a motorcycle road trip. I wonder how Norway would be if I didn't have one?

In Geiranger I saw a 1.5 hour blast round the fjords in a rigid inflatable, for 175KR. It looked fun but it's hardly a peaceful, quiet water experience! "17 heavenly kilometres" the film playing outside the booking office said about a downhill mountain bike ride. It looked full scenery with no pedalling. In Byrkjelo I found a poster for a group tour round a mountain circuit lasting several days on foot, a bus

tour with no bus.

However I haven't yet been anywhere near these lovely national parks without it hammering down with rain. It rained last night, it was raining when I left this morning and although the sun shone after the big scenery, it's raining again now. Whatever you choose to do in Norway, you will get wet.

Right, sunshine in between heavy rain in Lofthus.

While I was waiting for a boat this morning I got chatting to a German about Alta's invisible urban life. Apparently his forefathers burnt it to the ground before they left in 1945. The current German invasion should be more productive. I still find it strange to hear Germans talk to Norwegians in English. It's so normal that the campsite reception girl didn't notice I was English until I filled her form in.



July 8th, Friday, Valle, 31892 miles.

Valle is a little town with the necessary shops and a petrol station. It's raining again but yet again the tent's up dry. What a spectacular design it is.

It was a lovely day in Lofthus when I left but we've been over Haukelfjell since then. The road map doesn't show how big the big bits are. Hardangervidda obviously is because it's called that but the high plateau extends a long way south. The E134 crosses more desolate, bleak, moorland scenery. I think it peaks 1,000 metres above sea level.

Route 9, which we're on now, descends slowly for 50 miles through lots of ski resorts. These are complexes of grass roofed huts built into the pine wooded hillsides around a huge hotel or tourist centre. It could have been a lovely ride if the rain hadn't been so heavy.

We've stopped in Valle because there was a Lithuanian bloke on the site in Lofthus who came this way. He pointed out a little road which goes up onto the Plateau again and down into Lysefjord. There's a little village up the end which isn't on my Michelin 711 map. He showed me the pictures he took. "You must go there." OK, I will. With that in mind I changed the Swedish Kronor I don't need anymore to Norwegian so I can just about afford the detour. I have enough money for four more

days in Norway, not including the ferry out.

Molly almost broke down today. We hadn't been very far this morning when I felt her lose her usual enthusiasm. A bit later she wouldn't pull and broke into fits of violent pre-ignition when I tried to open the throttle. Stuck between a sheer wall of rock on one side and a 300m deep fjord on the other, we had no choice but to hold up the traffic until a parking place came up, luckily after only half a mile. By then she had only enough puff to pull 1st gear.

The pull in was one of those view points near something interesting, in this case the best waterfall yet, and we've seen hundreds. Millions of gallons of water fell out of the mountain, over the little gift shop drenched in spray. It crashed under and over the road, drenching the assembled camper vans too.

As soon as I broke out the spanners the greybeards from the camper vans gathered round with something new and exciting to look at, leaving their wives to watch yet another thundering deluge. "Do you have a problem?" they asked. I shouted "No, a

problem is when you can't fix it." over the noise of the water. "Stand back gentlemen, I need the light."

They were all German and chatted amongst themselves as they watched Molly have a carb rebuild to remove the piece of fluff from her main



jet. She earned nods of approval all round by firing up sweetly afterwards. "Have you far to go?" They asked. I told them "France" because of course I'm going to England eventually, being English.

There's a gift shop in town here with free internet access, a computer on a table in the street, running and ready to use, in the rain. It wasn't wet enough to stop me emailing home, just briefly. This isn't something you can tell anyone about instantly.

They just know I'm OK now.

July 9th, Saturday morning,
waiting for the weather.

As ever, it rained all night but
now there are patches of blue
and everything is cloaked in
swirling steam which, as ever,
will waft away as the sun rises.

This campsite is walled by a
sheer face of bald rock, right.

Down here the geology's
changed. Although it's still
obviously Norway and wringing

wet, the texture is different. To be honest I've enjoyed the soaked, steaming, foggy
part of this trip. It adds atmosphere, literally, to all this endless, majestic scenery,
marvellous!



It's "forbudt" to ride bicycles in the tunnels. Where do they go? People cycle all over
Norway.

I noticed in some places what's left of the original road clings to the crumbling face
of whatever the new tunnel goes through. As with everywhere in Norway, the road
network is improving. They're still building tunnels and bridges everywhere.

Travelling looks like it must have been a fantastic adventure once. In some places
there's still only a single track road on the side of a mountain with the sea or a
thousand foot drop on the other side. In places, even the E6 is like this.

July 9th, Saturday, Lysebotn, 31950 miles. 59° North, same latitude as Orkney.

Lithuanian bloke's ride
out turned out to be
one of the world's best
places. More
moorland, up over
1,000m again, right,
up past all the ski
resorts into my
favourite desolation.
The road has
something to do with
hydroelectric power
installations and only
exists for maintenance
purposes. It goes over



the top properly and for a few hundred metres it broke through the cloud into sunshine.

Then it was back down into the wind and rain through the most beautifully barren landscape I've seen so far. Not smooth and flat like the North but deep drops and huge lumps the road has to twist and turn in between.

I left the camera in its bag for most of the ride because the rain was too heavy to use it.



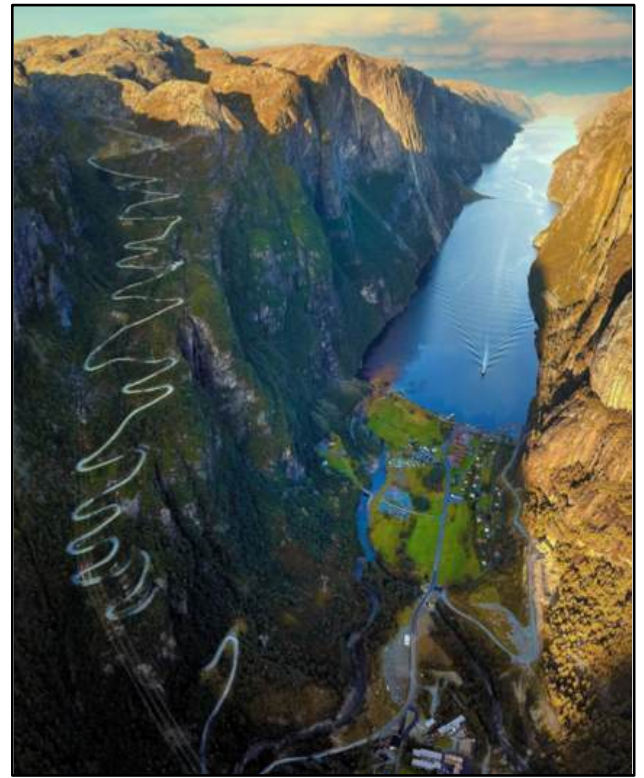
The road falls for a while to a tourist centre at the bottom of a walk up to Kjerag, a freaky rock jammed in a crevice the brave take pictures of themselves standing on. On a good day the view from the centre, over the edge into Lysefjord is spectacular. Not today though. It's pretty much 1km, straight down into the water.



To get to Lysebotn the road drops that 1km in a 7km stack of 27 hairpins with a 1.1km tunnel at the bottom, which is also a wide radius hairpin, in the dark. At first it feels like riding off the edge and it's another involuntary "Fuckin' hell!" moment. Below is the Molly's eye view of that. Next page top right is an internet's arial view on a sunny day.

The village itself is a few houses, mostly for the workers from the two hydroelectric power stations built into the surrounding mountains. There's two hostels for the coolest dudes in the world, a lovely little campsite and the ferry terminal which is also the headquarters of the Stavanger Base Jumping Club, next page top left.





As soon as I rode onto the site I was greeted by a base jumper. They do that off the top and fly down the fjord as far as they can get in their special winged flying suits. Lysebotn is on the internet as one of extreme sport's best places to do, on the planet. It attracts adventurers from California and Australia, everything is in English and there's a sort of surf shack, cafe, bar with real music on a proper sound system with friends who come together from around the world in places like this to show each other death defying stunts on their laptops. All the staff are Russian, they speak Cyrillic behind the bar. A camper van here is likely to be an old Volkswagen bus or an ex military truck.

The bar room has banknotes from around the world pinned all over it and T shirts signed by the most notorious. There's a wrecked mountain bike hanging from the ceiling which someone rode off the top and photos of blokes leaping into oblivion everywhere. This week they can't serve alcohol because of some sort of licensing infringement. It's that sort of place.

There are two boats out daily. It's a three hour trip down the fjord and looks spectacular all the way. Preikestolen, The Pulpit Rock, and Kjerag are both a five hour trek on foot, uphill. For an hour or so the sun broke through down here and it all looked magical. It's tipping down again now though.

Since I wrote the camper van thing four old Volkswagens have pulled in. It's 7.00pm now and there isn't a single, offensively white Hymer anywhere. The water fall above the site is pounding the rocks on the far side of it because it's rained very hard up on the top. We can't see the tourist centre anymore. I found a rare



bunch of Brits, in a homemade Landrover conversion with a woodburner chimney sticking out the top, down by the harbour. It had wetsuits hanging on it. They can't be surfing, there's hardly a tide never mind waves.

Lithuanian bloke liked this place, he's young, he would. He asked "Why are you travelling with an IZH?" "I want to, I love it." I told him. "How many kilometres?" he asked and smiled when I said "10,000, so far."



July 10th, Sunday, 32006 miles. Sunshine and showers today. I went back up to the Tourist Centre below Kjerag for at least a little visibility, sometimes, good enough to take a last look at Norway's big scenery. My camera is suffering badly from condensation. We're losing pictures to "file error". It's wet, it's been in Norway.

July 11th, Monday, nameless campsite 30 miles north of Kristiansand, 32150 miles.

Biblical rain turned the campsite in Lysebotn into a swamp last night. Visibility was only a third up the side of the fjord this morning. I took the boat out, 280KR for 45km of lovely Lysefjord. It's deeper than Geirangerfjord at 450m and the commentary on the ferry's PA system said Kjerag is the highest point. Base jumpers free fall off there for 10 seconds before they pull their ripcords.

The power station, right, was built in 1917 and the pipeline feeding it water goes down the side of the fjord alongside the longest wooden staircase in the world. No one lives in the farms along the top anymore. They were only reachable by climbing steps made of logs set into the hillside. The tax collectors of the day collected taxes in cash by visiting the farms in person. So the farmers removed the steps.



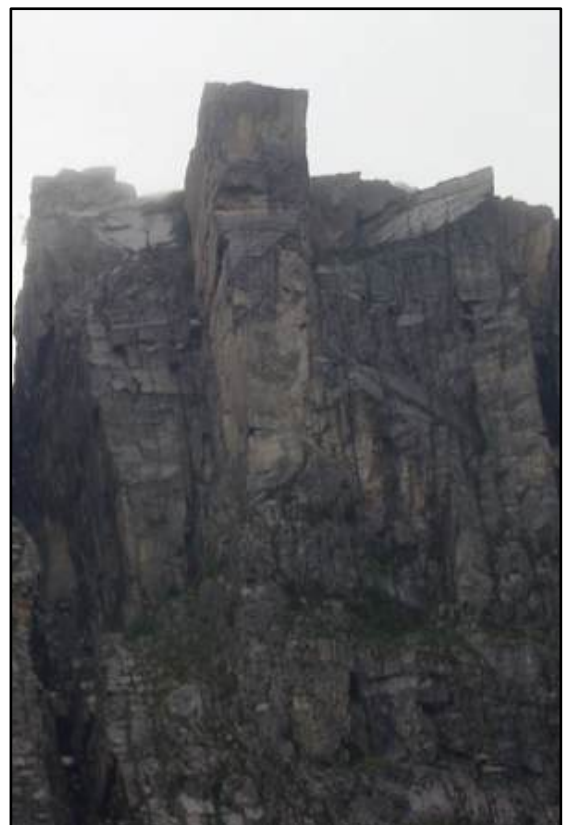
Half way down the fjord there's an inlet called Vagabond's Cove, so called because the local vagabonds hid there once, instead of paying tax, next page top. Apparently they were discovered but prevailed by pelting the tax collectors with rocks from their impregnable fortress. Tax collecting in old Norway sounds like a

fun job! The really fun part of Vagabond's Cove is how the ferry can edge its way in deep because the sides are vertical, above and beneath the water. The ferry is a sight seeing trip as well as a car ferry, which must be a source of irritation to the locals who just want to get there.

Locals? This little corner of Norway is astonishing and difficult to get to. The traffic is limited by the size of the little ferry. The bus tours don't go here. However there are some parts they can get at. Right is a busy day on Preikestolen. Bottom is what it looks like from the water, on a dull day. One day it'll fall. Lysebotn is right down the end.

Tonight I was distracted by a lively Dutch girl, her boyfriend and the saga of adjusting her chain, motorcycle chain that is. She hadn't had a license long and bought her Kawasaki second hand. She slid off it on Trollstigen because she's Dutch and hadn't seen a mountain hairpin bend before. While she was waiting for a new clutch cover in Alesund she noticed her chain was dragging over her centre stand. Everything was corroded up solid because it's all made of Japanese racing cheese. They couldn't adjust it. Her boyfriend hadn't ever heard of oiling anything either, maybe he worked in an office. By the time they reached this campsite the chain was so loose and rusty, and making so much scary noise, she didn't want to ride any further. I overheard her trying to ask the campsite owner if he knew of a mechanic in the area. Although her English was accent free and perfect, the campsite bloke was the only Norwegian in Norway who didn't speak a word of it. "Do you know anything about motorcycles?" she asked me, desperate, when I interfered.

They had only the flimsy toolkit which came with



the bike, no spares, no oil, no maintenance or any idea that they should do any. “We have breakdown insurance.” he said. “So do I.” I thought, and broke out Molly’s bag of hardware. We carefully hammered their wheel spindle until it came out.

July 12th, Tuesday, Hirtshals, 32185 miles.

We’re in Denmark. Two ferry companies operate services between Kristiansand and Hirtshals, Colour Line who I know and Fjordline who I don’t. We arrived at the terminal to find a queue forming at the Fjordline check in, due to open at 11.30am for the 13.30pm boat. Sadly the boat was full but we could buy a reserve place in case someone didn’t turn up. Eight other hopefuls did the same. Check in closed at 13.15pm with nine punters missing. The reserve vehicles weren’t the same shape as the missing ones. Myself and a couple of Dutch mates waited on the dockside while the crew shuffled campervans and caravans around, making just enough space for three thin motorcycles.

Fjordline run a Fjordcat, a leary hydrofoil, speedboat thing which blasts across the 140km in 2 hours, 15 minutes, costing 500KR and 10,000 litres of diesel. It’s faster, cheaper and we got on it, just. My new Dutch friends rode a scruffy, camouflaged Kawasaki and an



old CX650 Eurosport, in work boots, camo trousers and fluorescent road crew jackets. We got along fine. They’re a comedy double act. They’d never heard of IZH. I told them Molly was worthless in England. “No one will steal it then.” they said. “In Holland they steal everything. My wife? Gone! Took me ages to find a thief.” They kept up the jokes all the way across.

This morning, back in Norway, Molly attracted a German who fought like a demon to believe she was an MZ. He called his Ukrainian wife over. “Oh it’s an IZH from Ishevsk in Russia. In Ukraine, everybody had one.” she said. She gave me two tins of corned beef and a tin of tuna, bought cheaper in Germany. “Don’t buy food in Norway, it’s too expensive!” Yeah, I know.

This Danish campsite is just outside the ferry terminal in flat, sandy countryside. To get to Kristiansand there’s long descent because the rocky scenery in Norway doesn’t stop, but Denmark is hardly visible from the incoming ferry



because the highest thing in this part is pine trees.

July 13th, Wednesday, Søndervig, 32362 miles.

The sign on the way in said Søndervig but I could be in Caister or Hemsby near Yarmouth, same grass covered sand dunes, same little seaside town with the same attractions, if you're little, and the same people on holiday. The atmosphere is exactly the same.



The town is on the sand bar which carries route 181 down the Danish West Coast, a few inches above sea level. The sea's on both sides for miles. A few degrees more global warming and most of West Denmark's

history. And on the subject of history, there's still German WW2 pill boxes on the beach, part of the Third Reich's Fortress Europe.

Søndervig's big day out is a sandcastle festival.

Apparently the world's best sandcastle sand is here.



The highest point in

Denmark is Møllehøj, a grassy hill only 171m above sea level and nowhere near here. Denmark is a gentle land of easy extremes and seems less concerned with the frantic pace of life elsewhere.

July 14th, Thursday, Skærbæk, 32443 miles.

There's about 20 miles of Denmark left. We only rode a few miles today because there doesn't seem to be any camber on Danish roads and the rain came crashing

down heavier and heavier. We were splashing through an inch of surface water as well. Molly will get some vital component wet at some point but so far she's purring along, loving it. It rained so hard today the water has penetrated where it never has before. Anything paper has become soft, limp and fragile and anything fabric feels damp and clammy having soaked up every leak. If Molly fires up tomorrow it'll be a minor miracle.

I met Henrik, who lives on the campsite. He's a teacher and works in a school 10km away but because Denmark's so quiet and flat, it's a safe, easy cycle ride to get there each day.

July 15th, Monday, Saltau, 32660 miles.

We're in Germany. At around 8.00pm the sun shone. I can't believe how quickly it set. It was filtering through the trees around the campsite half way up, then a minute later it had gone. That's Southern solar geometry. That's it then, Hei Hei Scandinavia.

August 5th, back in Norfolk, 34357 miles.

After Germany we crossed The Rhine through Schwarzwald and Le Vosges to camp near Gérardmer in France. The Campsite was 750m above sea level in pine forest and thick fog. I followed a campsite sign I found in the mist, up and up, on a tiny little road. By then, everything was soaked. All my possessions were dripping wet but because this was the last campsite before my sister's house near Clermont Ferrand and a real bed, it didn't matter. Some Dutch kids spent most of the night having a lovely time damming the rivers of flood water flowing through the site. Their earthworks burst

in the small hours, flooding me too, bless them. On the worst morning ever, having been left out in the weather for weeks, would Molly be too wet to run? Unpack the spanners in the mud? Mechanics in the agony of yet more heavy rain? No, not this time. How sweet she is!

