

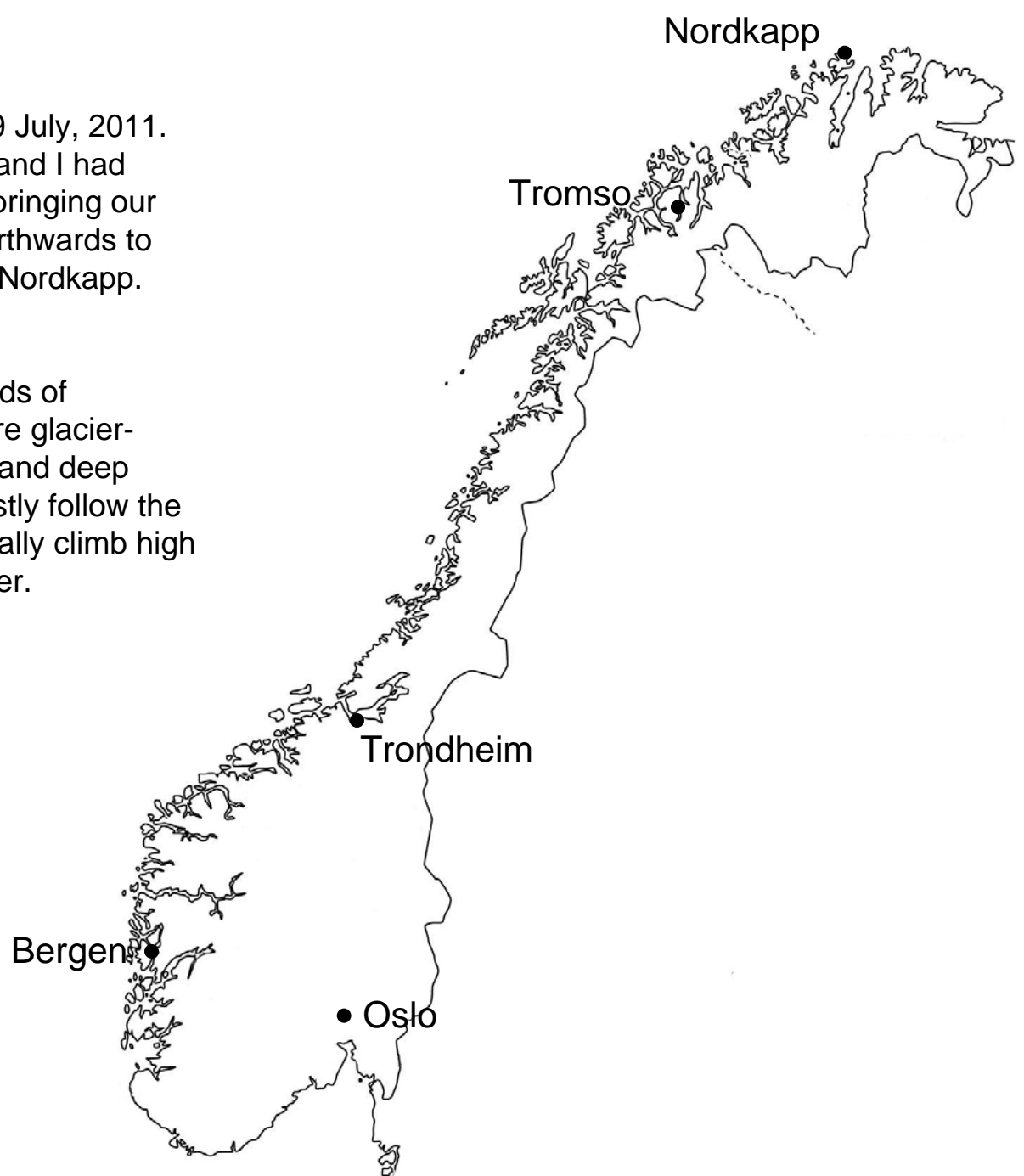
Colin & Jenni's cycle tour in Norway

July & August, 2011



Jenni and I met in Bergen on 19 July, 2011. She had flown from New York, and I had come from New Zealand, both bringing our bikes. Our plan was to cycle northwards to Tromsø, and perhaps as far as Nordkapp.

Bergen is in the heart of the fjords of southwestern Norway. These are glacier-carved valleys with steep walls and deep water alongside. The roads mostly follow the edge of the fjords, but occasionally climb high to cross from one fjord to another.





Roads in Norway are carved out of solid rock. They are made with rock-drills and explosives, not with bulldozers as in New Zealand.



Road tunnels were frequent. Often we cycled through them; at other times (as in this photo) we were able to use the “old road” which had been retained as a cycle path. A few of the tunnels are forbidden to cyclists and there is no alternative path; so when planning a trip it is essential to choose a route which avoids those tunnels.



Norwegians take great care to make their houses blend in with the landscape. Even new homes like this one are designed so they harmonize with older dwellings alongside.



Bus shelters are given the same treatment. Many had a turf roof like this one. The location “Kvarme” had been hand-carved onto a board, and Jenni noticed that the carver had added his own name and date onto the edge of the board.



This is a brand new ski resort on the road to Vik. Although the buildings are large and closely-spaced, care has been taken to minimize their impact on the landscape. Jenni and I couldn't help comparing this to the ugly resorts we remembered in New Zealand.



Crossing from one fjord to another usually involved a stiff climb. Here we are traveling up a valley away from the coast, towards the mountains. After days of rain the river was in flood.



Eventually the serious climbing starts. Here we have stopped for lunch at about 700 metres altitude, before tackling the next zig-zag (on the right).



At 900 metres the tree-line is reached. There's little shelter above that altitude, but the effort of climbing kept us warm (except for hands and feet).



At 1,450 metres on the plateau of Sognefjellet, which is the highest road pass in northern Europe.



After wind and rain on the summit the descents from these high passes were always exciting; a downhill rush at 45km/hr with the bikes rattling and swaying, and cold hands clenched on the brake-levers. This is the view of Vik on our way down the hill towards it.



What looked like a crashed German aircraft on the roadside at Gotli turned out to be a film prop; but one with an interesting story.



On April 27 1940 two planes – an english Blackburn Skua (L2940) and a german Heinkel 111 (1H+CT) were fighting in the area over Grotli. The Skua damaged the HE 111 so much that the german pilot Horst Schopis had to search for a place to take the aircraft down, and he managed so at the east end of the lake Heilstuguvatnet, 3 km from the Grotli Hotel. The English pilot Richard Partridge turned his Skua to go back to the air-craft-carrier “Ark Royal” outside Åndalsnes but he got engine problems and had to land on the lake Breidalsvatnet 4 km from Grotli. Few hours later both crews were searching for shelter and they met in the same hut not far from Grotli Hotel. This was the start of an exited story and of a special friendship that lasted lifelong between the two pilots. Partridge died in 1990 but Horst Schopis is still alive and will celebrate his 99th birthday on August 27 this year! The plane in front of you is a copy 1:1 that was used in a film about the story that was shot in the Grotli-area last winter. By others the Harry Potter actor Rupert Grint was here and is playing one of the main characters in the film. We are looking forward to seeing the film being released around February 2012!

For more information please go to the cafeteria were you also can see a small exhibition of this very special story.

Welcome!



Sometimes we were lucky with the weather on the high crossings, and then the mountain scenery was magnificent.





The highest point we reached on our trip was the mountain lookout at Dalsnibba, at 1,500 metres. We left our panniers at the bottom of the lookout road to make the climb easier.



From there we descended to Geiranger. This fjord is famous for its scenery, and a popular stop for cruise ships.



As we traveled north the fjords gave way to more gentle country. During the last Ice Age these hills were covered by an ice cap more than 2km thick. The weight and movement of ice ground the mountains down to smoothly-rounded humps. With no soil, little vegetation can grow on them.

In the farm in the foreground, notice the large barn and piles of plastic-wrapped silage. These are needed because stock have to be kept indoors during the winter, from November until May.



North of Tjøtta we reached the end of a chain of mountains called the *Sju Sostre*, the Seven Sisters. Like all the other hills on this part of the Atlantic coast, they were almost devoid of trees.

After some experimentation we had by now settled on our favourite morning tea: a potato pancake (*lomper*) spread with hazelnut spread (*Nugatti*) and wrapped around a banana!





At the northern end of the Seven Sisters Range is the town of Sandnessjoen, where a mighty suspension bridge (the *Helgelandsbrua*) crosses Leirfjord. We were buffeted by the wind on our way across, especially in the slipstream of big trucks.



Ferries played a big role in our trip. We crossed many fjords in this way, avoiding the huge detours which would otherwise be necessary. Here we are at Kilboghhamn, waiting in the morning sun for the ferry to Jektvik.



Because there is deep water close to the shore, we could sometimes look down from the roadside on dolphins as they passed.



Norway is famous for the graceful double-ended rowing boats which have been built here since Viking days. Sadly they are being replaced by fibreglass replicas, but here is a beautiful example made in the traditional way.



From the port of Bodo we caught a ferry to the Lofoten Islands. These mountainous islands have been a centre for cod-fishing for centuries, and the fishermen built houses on piles at the water's edge. Many of the houses are now used for tourist accommodation; but their traditional appearance has been retained.





There is a road tunnel running inside the hillside to the left, but the old road, shown here, has been kept as a cycle path. It was apparent that avalanches during the previous winter had torn away the safety barrier, (which explained why the expense of the tunnel was justified).



We expected that as we cycled north the scenery might become less interesting, but every day brought something new.



North of the Lofotens we cycled up the Atlantic coast. Here we are at a beachside camping ground at Stave. I took this photograph about 9.30pm, just before sunset.....



..... and this one just after midnight. It was now mid-August, too late in the year to see the “midnight sun” which would have been visible at this latitude throughout June; but still the nights never got darker than an average twilight. Sunrise occurred about 3am.



Perhaps there is a competition running among Norwegians to see who can build a summer cottage in the most inaccessible location.



By now it was clear that if we could maintain our present speed, we could reach Nordkapp in the time available. Here we are cycling up the western side of Storöfjorden, with wonderful views across the water.



Soon we began to encounter lemmings. This little fellow scampered into a hole on the roadside which was small enough that his bottom was left sticking out. When I tickled it with a twig he backed out screeching with indignation. He performed a war dance for several minutes before recovering his good sense and retreating. A feisty little fellow indeed!



We also met reindeer. They roam across vast areas of the far north, but are actually partly-domesticated and are herded by the indigenous Sami people. This photo was taken on the shore of a fjord called Porsangen, where the road runs almost level for more than 100km along the coast.



Although Nordkapp is said to be the northernmost point of mainland Europe, it is actually on the island of Mageroya. To reach the island we used the undersea *Nordkapptunnelen*, nearly 7km long. The tunnel ran steeply downhill for 3km at a gradient of about 9 degrees, leveled off briefly at 212 metres below sea level, then climbed back to the surface over the last 3km. For us the downhill was fast and freezing cold, and the climb a slow grind back to daylight.



I didn't stop for a photograph in the Nordkapptunnelen, but this is one taken at the bottom of a similar undersea tunnel five days later.



If this is to be a photographic record of the far north, it has to include one of the untold thousands of lemmings which are represented by pathetic smudges on the surface of every road.



The tundra of the far north is a desolate landscape. There is no shelter for cyclists, so a headwind makes progress very difficult. On the whole we were lucky with the wind, and only had a couple of days when it gave us trouble.



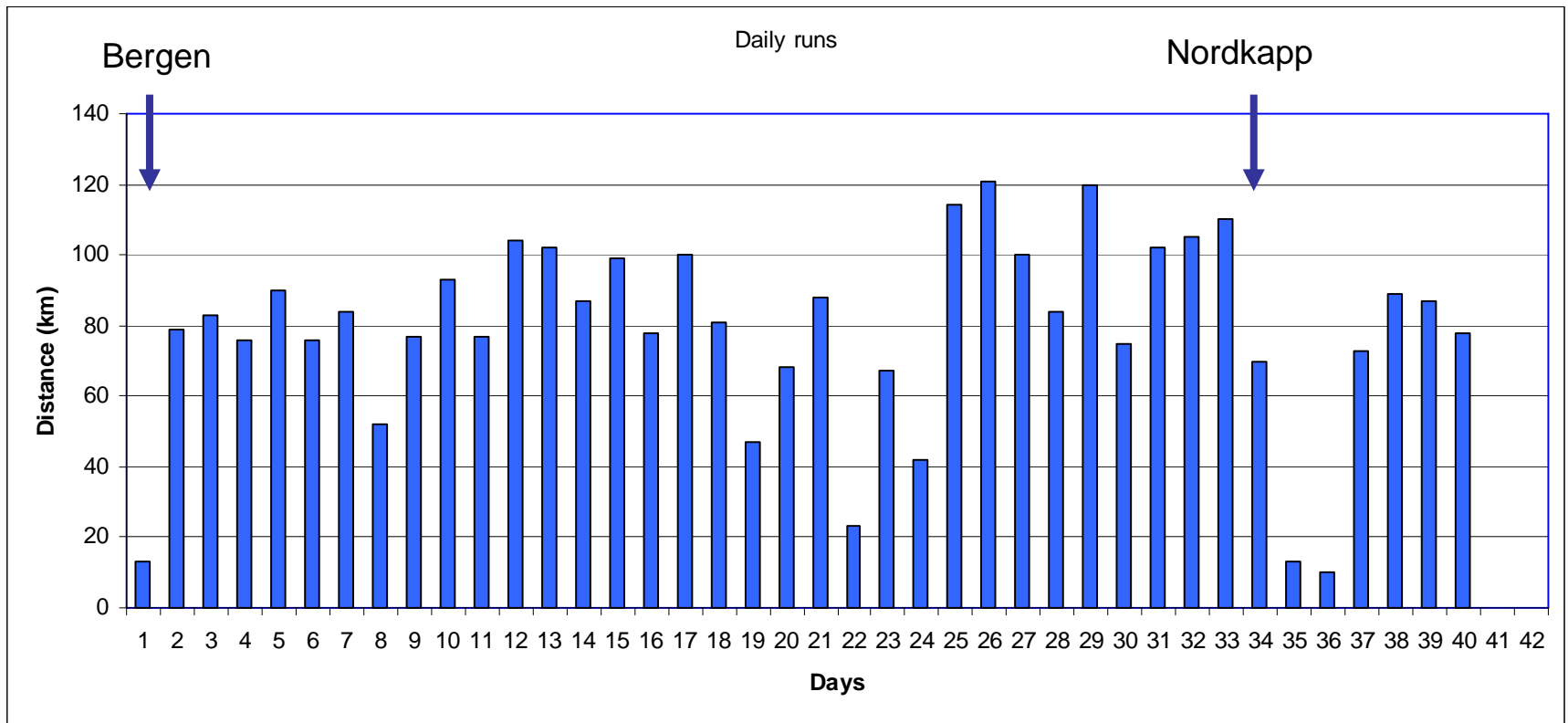
Our goal nearly in sight. Nordkapp is the headland to the right in this image.



The cape is marked with a sculpture showing the meridians of latitude and longitude; and here we are, 34 days and 2,750km after leaving Bergen. Jenni's bike is without panniers because we had left our gear at a campsite 30km to the south, and had ridden up to Nordkapp with empty bikes.



Our holiday was nearly at an end. We used a coastal ferry (*Hurtigruten*) to return south to Tromsø, where our flights out of Norway were due to depart; and then, with a few days to spare, explored some of the islands west and south of Tromsø. This photograph illustrates another advantage of cycling in Norway: free-camping is allowed by law, as long as you are not within 150 metres of a dwelling or on cultivated land.



This graph shows our daily runs. We started this trip with no firm idea about how far we might travel each day, or how often we might take rest days. As the journey progressed we found that 80km per day was a comfortable average, and at that pace we didn't feel the need for a rest day. The total distance covered was 3,137km.

Every night except the first and last was spent in our little tent; and we ate only one meal we didn't cook or make ourselves.

As for costs: my airfares amounted to just under NZ\$3,500. Total expenses while in Norway were about NZ\$2,200 each, (which works out to about NZ\$52 per person per day).

The last statistic: not a single disagreement between us in 42 days of traveling, under sometimes-trying conditions. Thanks Jenni!