

The First Voyage of Lumina – post 5

Sailing to Svalbard

8 - 14 June Across to the Lofoten Island chain

The Lofoten islands are a chain that heads out from the mainland at about 30 degrees so that the last one is about 60 miles from the mainland coast. If you want to go across when travelling up from the south the earlier you cross, then the longest sea crossing you have. We were looking at a couple of pretty much windless days coming up so took the decision to do the longer crossing rather than go on up the coast for a day or so and have a shorter crossing. This would mean that we would have the good weather out on the islands rather than when crossing. The wind direction was ok initially but was forecast to turn and eventually die altogether later in the day. Therefore we set course to follow the wind and make good speed in the general direction, expecting to have to motor the last few hours as the wind dropped to correct the course.

The outermost island that is inhabited is called Rost. Quite an unimposing island compared to its neighbours that have high mountains on them, Rost is just about 1.5 miles by a mile and only a few feet above sea level. Essentially it is a harbour with a small town. It is one of what would have in the past been many places that are totally dependant on fishing. However, those with larger harbours more suited to modernisation have prospered at the

expense of the smaller places that are generally just holiday homes now.



The Beer/Fish equation seemed to work for both sides

When we had been a few miles out we had passed a chap on a small boat fishing and soon after we had tied up, he came in and started gutting his fish. I wandered over to see what he was catching. He had only been out for about an hour after work

and had caught maybe 40 large coalfish (Coley) each maybe 3 or 4 kg. He swapped one for a couple of beers and said he just did it for a hobby but was a useful extra source of income.

There are three ways that you have to pay for harbours in Norway, the Go Marina app which is just like a parking app, another system called Vipps which only works if you have a

Norwegian bank account, or put some cash in an envelope. This harbour only seemed to take Vipps, so we went to the supermarket where it said you could go to get a card if you wanted electricity, however they would not take money for the pontoon and despite making a phone call to see what we should do, the end result was that we didn't have to pay.



Rost, a working town in Lofoten

On the way back a tractor and trailer came past and slowed right down to give a wave – it was our friendly fisherman from yesterday. There was also a steady stream of tractors and trailers taking bins full of dried cod. It is the time of year when they take the fish off the racks where they have been drying since the winter when they are caught. Then they are exported to places like Nigeria where it is now a delicacy. Apparently after the Biafran war in the late 1960s during the famine, many countries sent aid. We probably sent flour but the Norwegians sent dried fish, they liked it and now it's an important export market.



With settled fine weather we headed across about 30 miles to the tip of the end of the main Lofoten islands and an anchorage that I had heard about as wonderful in the right conditions. To get there we had to cross the famous maelstrom. This is where the fast flowing tidal currents make whirlpools and

standing waves in certain conditions. In fact it had such an impression on Edgar Allan Poe that he used it as the model for Jules Verne's Maelstrom. *"Even while I gazed, this current acquired a monstrous velocity. Each moment added to its speed – to its headlong impetuosity. In five minutes the whole sea was lashed into ungovernable fury."* Well, either Poe was a wimp, or it was a bit more impressive the day he went as it was very meek as we crossed.



The anchorage was superb white sand with a backdrop of a high mountain behind. We took the dinghy and explored the shore in the sunshine. The sea was turquoise and still as a millpond. The view out to the islands we had come from was spectacular, you would never have believed this was Norway.

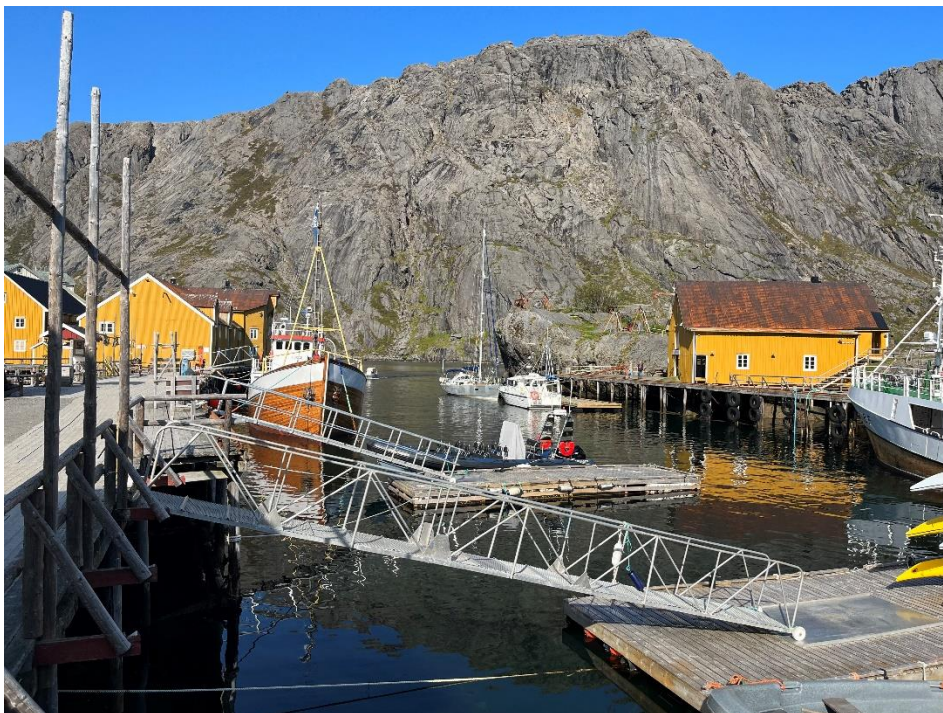
Near the anchorage was another bolt hole, marked as an anchorage but would be very tight, called Helle so obviously worth going to. Around the corner you come to the end of the Lofoten highway and another notable place called A, yes A, well a Norwegian A with a tiny circle above it that I can't find on this keyboard. It is the destination for the many motorhomes that are on tour but after seeing maybe 60 parked up in one place on the clifftop I think I prefer the sea, it's a lot quieter out here as we haven't seen another yacht for 4 days! Only completed in 2007 this route has many tunnels and bridges joining the islands and through mountains.

Further on from A is Reine, but there was no rain in fact it was the second day of complete sunshine and no wind. In the distance we saw a yacht motoring in a rather strange fashion and as we got closer it became obvious they were watching a small pod of 4 or 5 Orcas. By

the time we got closer they had gone and the yacht proceeded past us heading out to the end of the islands. About an hour later we came upon another pod of Orcas. This time there were about 20 of them circling what was probably a shoal of fish. We stopped about a hundred metres before them and they continued. We drifted with them for about half an hour, an incredible experience to have them so close that you could hear them breathing as they come up, taking no notice of us as they got on with their meal. There were several large males with their tall fins and many smaller ones and some real youngsters.



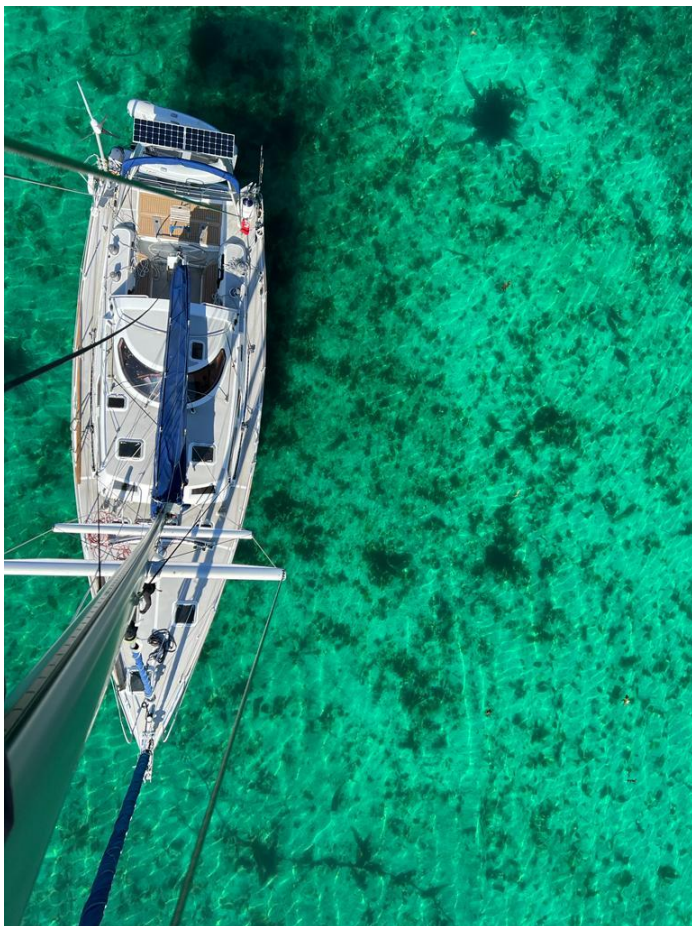
After the Orca experience, we continued on to Nusfjord, a picturesque fishing village for the night. The guidebooks gush over it but, alas, today the whole place is owned by a hotel with spa and expensive restaurants. Any fisherman were long gone probably because it was so small and intimate that was not suited to modern boats or the lorries that need to get in to take away the catch. You could have everything between a fishing trip or rib ride to a hot stone massage, but we just got a deal on the harbour costs as there was no water or electric on the pontoon.



Nusfjord

From Nusfjord we proceeded on to Kabelvag a not quite so intimate harbour where we snuck into another tight berth next to a nice pub that was so inviting that we could not resist their Angus burger and beer later. We had noticed an Ovni (same make as my previous boat) in the area and they had been posting their trip on Facebook so I sent them a message. It turned out that they were only just around the corner in Svolvær the “capital” of the Lofotens so we arranged to meet up for coffee. The morning was foul with rain and fog so was a good excuse to discuss boats and expeditions. By lunchtime we had decided not to move on so walked into Svolvær. This is the equivalent of Ambleside or Beddgelert but with troll mugs and lofoten fridge magnets. The town was very quiet as there were no cruise ships in but you got the feeling all would change when one was there.

From Svolvær there are a couple of different ways north towards Tromsø, each one is through fjords that ensure the Lofotens are islands, they used to have ferries but now are connected by tunnels and bridges. It would take three days to get up to Tromsø where we would regroup and wait for a suitable weather window for the three or four day crossing to Svalbard.



View from the top of the mast – its not always like this