

The First Voyage of Lumina – post 6

Sailing to Svalbard

15 - 21 June Up to Tromso and on to Bear Island and Svalbard

We had a couple of stops on the way through the inland fjords between Svolvær on the south side of the Lofotens to Tromsø which is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through to the Norwegian Sea. The first was just a shallow bay amongst farmland and the second was one which we had passed on our previous trip and thought was worth a second look. Klauva is a tight little bay just off the main route north and once held an important trading settlement. Today however there is just one building remaining and just ruins. It was not until we looked at the information board with old photo that it was clear how many buildings there once were but like the small fishing villages that once were bustling but declined when others that could be



modernised took priority it must have been the same for this place. Whilst it was a great little sheltered cove, there was no road access and no room for expansion so would have lost out to other places that could build larger docks and stone breakwaters when they needed more space. It appeared that the wooden buildings were probably dismantled and used elsewhere as there were no rotting timbers, just the stone foundations and cellars remain.

Klauva today and in its prime



In the meantime, Tromsø had become an even more important regional centre with miles of wharfage catering for every need in the 21st century. Here is everything you need to keep your ship in working order, together with companies distributing supplies imported by water to the area. Then you have the thriving tourist trade both from the independent traveller in their motorhomes and rental cars to the thousands that descend on the town from several cruise ships a day that dock here come together to make it a bustling modern port. It is also one of the regular stops on the Hurtigruten route and when we arrived there were two in port. The Polarlys was on the regular route and the Otto Sverdrup was on an *expedition* cruise as they call it – I think the catering and accommodation is a bit different to our expedition.



Hurtigruten Polarlys and Otto Sverdrup in Tromsø

You will of course know that Otto Sverdrup was the ships captain on Nansen's voyage in the Fram in the late 19th century where they intentionally froze the ship into the ice somewhere north of Siberia with the intention of proving that the ice drifted across the North Pole. In those days no one knew what lay to the north and when the wreckage from a ship lost in the search for the Northeast Passage somewhere close to the Bearing Strait called the Jeanette was found on the shores of Greenland three years later, Nansen realised that the whole polar ice cap gradually moved. It would also disprove theories of large land masses to the North as well. Nansen's plan was to build a small ship capable of surviving the rigours of being frozen into the ice and then equip it for several seasons and drift across the North Pole which was waiting to be discovered. Anyway everything went almost according to plan, the ship was fine, they drifted for a year or so but not quite in the expected direction. When it became obvious that they would not reach the pole Nansen took one man and they tried to reach the pole on sledges. After a while, they too realised they would not make it as the ice was taking them backwards, so they turned around and headed for Franz Joseph land which is a little to the east of Svalbard. An incredible tale of endurance including spending the winter in a little shelter they made and eventually ending up with a chance meeting with an English expedition. There is a picture in the Polar museum of their meeting making it look

like that of Stanley and Livingstone but here whilst Nansen immediately knew it was Jackson as his expedition was in the planning stage when they had left, Nansen was in such a dishevelled condition that Jackson didn't realise who he was at first.

Soon afterwards they got a lift back on Jackson's ship which had come to re-supply them and arrived back in Tromso within a couple of days of the Fram, which in the meantime, had continued drifting under the command of Otto Sverdrup and eventually escaped from the ice and made their own way back to Tromso and their place in history.



Tromso is a very modern town, I am not sure if there was much of the old place that has been knocked down or that it has grown up in the latter part of the 20th century but there are very few old buildings even round the harbour where the yacht berths are. The commercial wharfs are all along the side of the fjord and run for several miles. Here we wandered the tourist shops, bought coffee and cakes but didn't require much else as we are still well stocked from home. We talked with various people on the dock and got some interesting pointers as to the

best anchorages on Svalbard and visited the Polar museum which documents the many attempts on reaching the Pole that left from Svalbard.

The geography of Svalbard and its unique geographical position with the Gulf Stream bringing warm water all the way from the Caribbean results in it being the furthest north that you can get without encountering pack ice. In times gone by this meant the distance to the North Pole was shortest and means that today regular sailors like us can get a taste of the far north.

After a visit from Border Force to stamp our passports out of Norway, as Svalbard is not in Schengen, we left mid morning and spent most of the day motoring against the wind to get out to the open sea. By evening the weather had improved dramatically and as we left the coast and headed North we were treated to the midnight sun directly ahead of us. By 9.30 the next morning the wind had abated somewhat and we had the engine on to help. The fog bank we had been watching approach for a while descended and the temperature dropped to around 6C. At 3pm we escaped the fog back into brilliant sunshine however by 9pm we were back into the fog. At 4pm the following day we reached Bear Island shrouded in fog

with only about 100m visibility. We slipped into a sheltered bay and dropped the anchor. We had covered 311 miles in 54 hours.

I had hoped to land here and visit the site of an old whaling settlement in the next bay but the bay was surrounded by cliffs, so we picked up the anchor and picked our way round the coast.



We did go to Bear Island – *honest!*

After looking in several bays and not seeing much, with the tide against us we dropped anchor again and made a meal. So, at 9pm with no sign of the fog lifting we decided to head on whilst the sailing conditions were good towards Svalbard. By the following afternoon we could see the white mountains in the distance. We needed to continue for some time before we could anchor and with only a light wind behind us, the engine did many hours. Eventually we came to what seemed like a wonderfully sheltered place, almost windless but the relentless swell from the ocean came in and with the boat lying across the swell it rocked continuously and we could not sleep. I went out twice in the dinghy and tried to lay out the kedge anchor, of fortress design, but as far as I can see they are just kelp rakes and it would not hold to turn us into the swell.



So, at 0400 (after 4 days of 4 hour watches and a sun that never sets you don't know what time it is) we were off again to go "just round the corner" into Hornsund. As we turned into

the fjord we went from no wind to 35kn and whilst it was only about 7 miles to motor, head on we were only doing 2 or 3kn so aborted to head further on down the coast. Now with a scrap of genoa out we were suddenly doing 7kn without the engine.

With the air so clear up here and everything so bright distances are deceptive and it was still 08.30 before we were anchored at Dunoyhamna or down islands where they used to collect eider down from the birdsnests.



We slept, had breakfast at lunchtime and enjoyed the view. Later we motored the 5 or 6 miles to the glacier front, which was about a mile further inland than charted so despite keeping about 500m away we were shown as sailing on land. A sign of the times...

The glacier front at about 500m



Breakfast at lunchtime. We didn't expect to be eating outside in Svalbard.