

# The First Voyage of Lumina – post 3

## Sailing to Svalbard

25-30 May Lerwick to Alesund and onwards to the Atlantic Road

The plan was to leave Lerwick around lunchtime so that the sea had a while to calm down from the previous days storm. We dawdled up to Malakoff, the ships chandlers, a rather different place to what you would find on the south coast with loads of stuff for fishing boats and ships and no trinkets for visiting yachts. However, we were looking for a specific adaptor for our fenders. The store owner knew what we wanted and said he used to buy that type and upon rummaging in a tray he found the offending little brass piece and sold it to us for a price that reflected what it was worth ten or so years ago, anyway it got rid of some stock he had given up hope of selling and solved our problem of not being able to pump up the fenders.

Walking back to the harbour we passed the fuel dock and there was an old French fishing boat taking on diesel. I asked the operator if they were going to be long and apparently, they were nearly finished and there should be enough to give us a couple of hundred litres. Back at the boat we cast the lines and headed over to the other side of the old harbour. After a certain amount of faffing the French eventually left and we took their place. There was some debate as to whether there was actually 200 litres to be had as the tank was nearly empty and they were waiting for a delivery. At 199 litres the pump stopped and I thought it had run out but no, we were full – not a bad estimate I should say!

Norway is full of self service pumps on docks so you never see anyone, however in good old Britain it is remarkably archaic on the water, in Lerwick you have to go to the shop, or ring them, then the attendant walks the hundred or so yards to the fuel dock, gives you the fuel then either rings the shop or walks back with you to pay. Then you have the lovely charade of signing a form to declare what % of the fuel you are going to use for propulsion and what for heating. The accepted formula seems to be 60/40 which seems to keep HMRC happy.

At about midday we left the fuel berth and radioed the harbour master to say we were heading out. Certain harbours are very busy on the radio with every movement being noted and Lerwick is one of them, others like Milford Haven don't expect leisure traffic to let them know your intentions and don't seem to worry unless you are getting in the way!

With a good southwest wind we were soon flying along and hit nearly 9 knots at one point. Norway would soon be in our sights, however the predicted wind shift was right and eventually we were trying to sail directly downwind in a big sea. This is particularly difficult as the rocking of the boat tends to knock the wind out of the sails. The night was short and not very dark and soon we were threading our way between the oil rigs on the UK side of the boundary, then there is a short gap and you come the Norwegian rigs. Whilst it looks really difficult on the chart in reality its not such a big problem, you just need to keep 500m away from them otherwise they get upset. We did hear one warning being given out to

someone who was too close, but with their size, they would look absolutely massive at that distance anyway. Later there was a tanker directly in our path, it was not moving but not anchored either. Not wanting to change course too much I called him up and asked if we could cross his bow with about half a mile clearance. No problem came the reply as they were just drifting. The Aurora Spirit is a special tanker designed to be loaded at sea from a mooring buoy. This is a pretty tricky operation but saves the building of a pipeline back to shore from the oilfield.

Later as the wind dropped further we had to put the engine on as there was a big wind coming later and the intention was to be amongst the fjords by then. We changed our course from the original destination to get in sooner and with the wind building eventually anchored at about midnight, 36 hrs after leaving Lerwick.

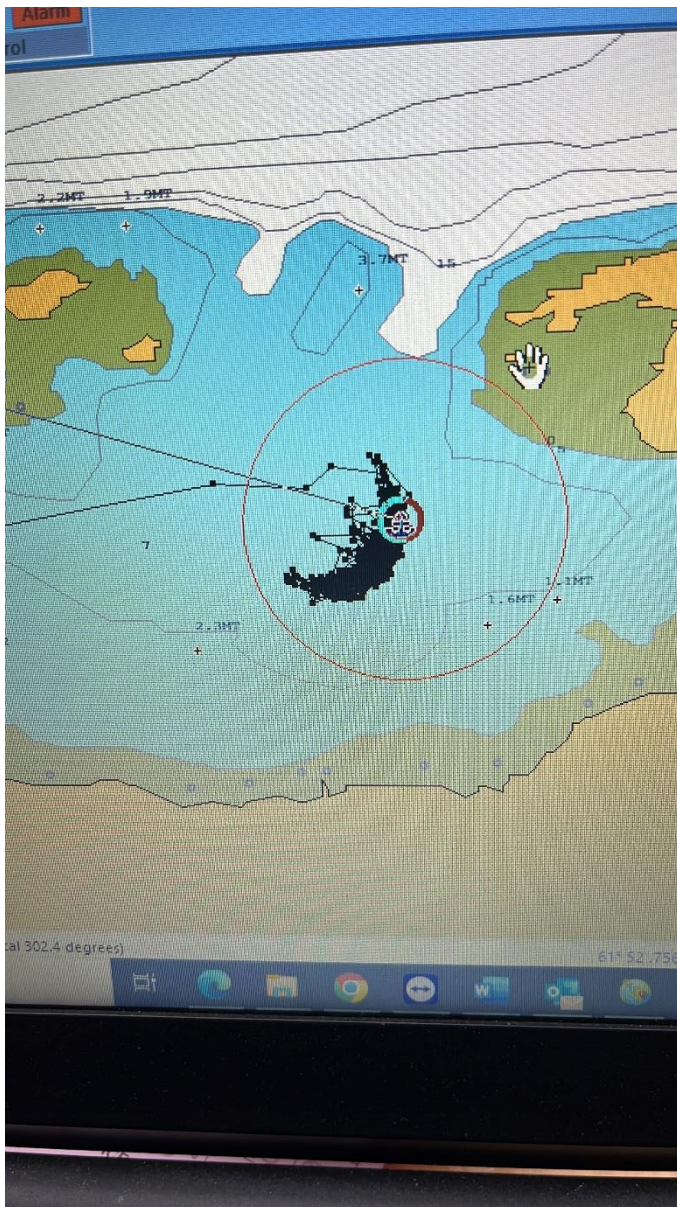
During the night the wind gradually built with heavy gusts coming off the mountains. With the anchor alarm set we retired. The anchor alarm is from the computer and has a circle around where you (think) you set the anchor. If the boat strays out of that ring then the alarm sounds.



Windy Anchorage

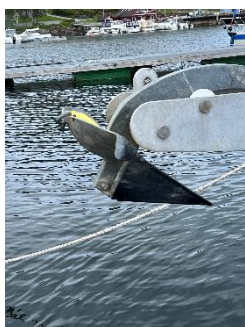
The anchor held firm, which was just as well as we were only about 80m from rocks behind us. With the wind varying from maybe 10 kn to a scary 60 in the biggest gusts, the boat turned back and forth. By the evening it was at its height. By now it was obvious that the anchor was going to hold but the forces were tremendous. You could hardly stand outside and every time the wind caught the boat on the beam it heeled as if we had full sail up. At one point I was sitting in the doghouse with the engine running, white gusts of spray wooshing by, expecting something to break on the anchor or chain, because if it had done so then I doubt one could have got the engine started before we reached the rocks.

Just a mile or so in front of our anchorage was a dock where a ferry kept running all day through the storm. I doubt they would have kept going in Scotland in such weather!



The chart plotter showing the anchorage and how the boat had swung. The black line from the left is our route in. Every minute or so it leaves a dot.

Note the rocks in green. The big red circle round the boat is for the alarm set at about 80m. I did have it set for less but when we swung to the extreme it would go off.



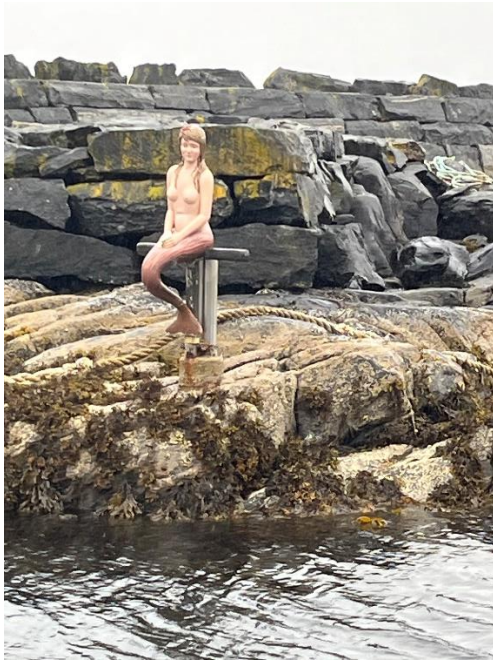
It's the anchor that holds you!

I had called the Norwegian Police to ask how we can check in, as we had made landfall further south than originally intended. No problem they said, just continue on to Alesund and check in there, they are open on Tuesday – three days hence.

With the storm passed a gentle sail/motor onwards through the fjords to the lovely island of Silda was completed by lunchtime. We stopped here last time and never saw a soul on this



idyllic island populated by holiday cottages. This time it was a little busier with several yachts in as well. We walked round the island watching the automatic lawnmowers creeping around that they are so keen on here, enabling your remote cottage to always have a perfectly cut lawn.



The Silda mermaid

We made an early start the following day to round the fearsome headland called Statt, which is accompanied with many warnings in pilot books and charts. There were none of the dangerous waves mentioned and we finished the day trying to anchor amongst some islands after the headland. Unfortunately the bottom seemed to be just pure rock with nothing for the anchor to bite into so we tied up at an old dock close by. The building looked like it may be a bar in the summer but was deserted and under renovation. There were many cabins and cottages on the islands, but all were deserted.



Deserted dock and old fisherman's shed.

Next morning, we sailed the last few miles into Alesund and went to find the Police station. With two large cruise ships in, the town was full their passengers, a very different bunch from those we had met in Lerwick. These seemed more of the booze cruise variety from enormous ships with thousands of cabins, rather than the Helly Hansen dressed ones off the Hurtigruten. However, they were all taking photographs and crowding the tourist shops keeping local trade going. With passports in hand and after some confusion about which entrance was border force as opposed to Immigration, we got our passports stamped in, and our 90 days in Schengen starts.



It seems others are cruising the Norwegian coast as well.

After Alesund there is a day of intense navigation with care needed not to lose your way through what can only be described as rock gardens. Initially we were in a wide passage protected by a couple of islands but as the second is passed you have a choice, go outside the rocks and get the big Atlantic swell or the inside passage called Stoplan. As the wind was not particularly strong and we had already endured the frustrations of the North Sea with the boat rocking the wind out of the sails we chose the inside passage. Initially exposed to the swell, at least you have no problem seeing where the rocks are as there were breaking waves in various places, some of which were rocks maybe 6m deep. The surfers rule is something like "the height of the breaking wave is the same as the depth of water" so with a 5m swell I can quite imagine a rock 6m below the surface causing a white maelstrom. What was more worrying is that every now and then you would pass a place with a continually breaking wave without a rock marked beneath... The crux of the Stoplan passage



is a dog leg between a couple of small islets which is only 60m wide. Not a place to meet a fishing boat coming the other way!



You need to pass between the posts!

We finished the day anchored close to the famous bridge on the Atlantic Road that is often photographed with a zoom lens from a strange angle to make it look impossible, a nice quiet anchorage at least.



The  
Atlantic  
Road