

EXTRA!

IN SCANDINAVIA ...by Steve Swygart

The principal idea for this trip was born many years ago, when Rockfax first published their “Lofoten Climbs” guidebook (in Norway, above the Arctic Circle), back in 2017, I think. I can recall picking it up to view in a climbing shop one rainy day (a typical Swygart pastime – using dead time to plan adventure) and the area looked absolutely phenomenal. At the time, we just didn’t have the holiday or the general will to go there as it is quite awkward and costly to get to and the weather is relatively unreliable (you don’t want to spend precious holiday time stuck in the rain, after all...), but now having retired, there is clearly more time to spend on both of these aspects. Fast forward to this year and we came back from our Dolomites ski trip in April with absolutely no idea what to do this summer, hence deploying this particular idea. I spent a few weeks in June planning it all out, so that the trip would take in some reasonable climbing in Sweden on the way up, as well as climbing areas en route to Lofoten, such as Setesdal (Norway’s little Yosemite) and Romsdal, where the infamous Troll Wall is located.

We started off by taking the ferry from Hull to Rotterdam which is overnight, so we had a decent dinner and a reasonable sleep, despite the bed vibrating slightly due to the engines. After a few wines, we knew no more until 0700, when we were awoken by the Tannoy system for breakfast. We then drove through Holland, past Hamburg and its horrendous traffic jams to a lovely lakeside campsite in the Schleswig-Holstein area, just off of the main road up to Denmark. The next day saw us go through the cornfields of Denmark and across into Sweden via the amazing Oresund Bridge. We are big fans of BBC4 Scandi-noir and other such series in general and I’d downloaded the theme tune to The Bridge (“Hollow Talk”) onto the Astell & Kern SR35 to play as we went down into the tunnel and then over the bridge. For this experience, we were charged the princely sum of £122 to witness this marvel of engineering and avoid time delays with a ferry! From Malmo onwards, it seemed like impenetrable forest all the way.

We stopped off at Markaryd, a pleasant village again by a lake, before arriving at our first destination, Navekvarn, a lovely little seaside village on the Baltic. The campsite was excellent, and the village had a good shop, a nice restaurant next to a marina and an excellent street-food truck. The climbing was in very close proximity via some back lanes and there was the possibility of kayak hire locally too. Google Maps really pulled it out of the bag with this one!

We had our first look at Simonsberget, which is one of the great old-school Swedish trad crags. In this section, I’m giving the British grade equivalent here, but suffice to say that Sweden has its own grading system, which is a little bit more sensible than the Norwegian equivalent, as it largely matched our narrower UK grade boundaries. The local guidebook pretty much states “how can you even know Swedish climbing if you haven’t been to Simonsberget”; an invitation to add to the climbing c.v. if ever there was one! There were some great looking lines, including a couple of futuristic-looking bolted ones now sadly covered with lichen....but there were lots of blank spaces in the granite where no holds and therefore no routes exist (I was going to use the word “currently” at this point, but they genuinely won’t). Orientation was a bit tricky from the base of the crag, with the guidebook consisting of badly drawn blocky line diagrams and Swedish text. Being a nature reserve,

the rock wasn't perhaps as "clean" as it more normally would have been. Confusingly, the many of the routes did not go the full height of the crag, but instead other route names started from ledges, perhaps trebling the number of actual "lines" (as we understand them) on the crag. Luckily for us, 5G and Google Lens was of some assistance, as were a few locals who were on hand to point us at a few classic routes so we could get started.



On Svarfarsomradet sector, we managed Bertil's Layback with Klinkers Kamin finish (VS 4b***), and the ultra-classic Svarfar (VDiff***), both about 35m. Both were top-quality offerings. It then got very hot, and we ran out of drink, so we retreated to the campsite to cool down by the Baltic Sea.

Klinkers Kamin Finish at Simonsberget

A few days later, after a kayaking trip around some small islands in the Baltic around the Oxelosund peninsula, we returned to do the classic Graviditetsleden (VS 4b***) one of the most popular routes at Simonsberget. It was very well protected, provided you had several large Friends (>#3). The last section of the

route gave rise to the route name in Swedish but fortunately our reasonable climbing technique saved us from getting anywhere near any trouble! Then it was over to the other end of the crag for the ultra-cool corner of Krisches Horn. It looked quite light on gear and holds but fortunately after committing above a small wire, it was well supplied with both at close quarters; a top end and top quality HVS 5a***.

Then it got too hot again and we retreated for another dip in the Baltic, before dinner out at the local restaurant by the harbour in the village. On this particular evening, England Women were playing Sweden in the quarterfinals of Euro 2025. Cue even more Swedish flags knocking about than usual (many homes have pennants outside as standard, as it's not allowed to fly the flag, except on appropriate flag days) and there were people on bikes with flags charging up and down the marina, shouting their support. As we sat outside the van, there were two sets of loud cheers on the campsite as Sweden went 2-0 up in the first half. We went to bed, and I was later awoken by screams of anguish and dismay – these turned out to be the penalty shoot-out that England won! Needless to say, it was all quiet on the Western Front the next day...

We also found a sport crag nearer to the village, Bistaberget. According to the guidebook, a local myth (c 1600's) has it that the crag was an "attestupa" - a place where old people committed suicide by jumping off the top of the cliff! One of the girls in the food truck looked very shocked when we mentioned that!

Well, the first route we did was Attestupan (5b***) We might be old, but we managed to stay on and not blob off! This was a route of the utmost quality taking an extremely unlikely-looking diagonal line up the main part of the crag at a very amenable grade. One that should definitely not be missed if you are ever in the area!

The start of the amazing Attestupan

We climbed a few other routes (a 5b and a 6a) before heading back to the idyllic Baltic Sea setting of the campsite. For dinner, we sampled the local food truck at the harbour, which was fabulous. The owner had a great sense of humour, as we found out when we met him earlier. He asked what we were doing in Sweden, and we said "climbing". On our return to purchase some food, and with typical Scandi deadpan manner, he said "Oh, so you're not dead, then?". I ordered a double elk burger and fries. Only in Sweden, I suppose? Navekvarn is a really lovely village and highly recommended should you ever be in this neck of the woods.



Getting across to Setesdal, our first Norwegian destination was probably going to take about 10/11 hours from this point, so I booked another site near the border, again, by a lake (is there a theme emerging here?). We managed to get a pitch right on the shore and immediately set off for a swim before dinner. I should mention that nearly all of these campsites have nice restaurants attached to them and are much cheaper to stay in than the vast majority of their UK counterparts.

Entering into Norway via a large and deserted customs outpost, we travelled through Oslo on an interesting toll road with no tickets or way to pay – or to even know what the price was. Presumably they'll send the bill to our home address? This must be an extremely wealthy city; I know it's situated on a fiord but the number of yachts in the harbour was phenomenal. Most of it rose up on the hillsides out of the sea giving it an expensive vibe, with all of the transport links at sea level. From the great metropolis, the motorway led out into the sticks and eventually over some big hills and steep sided valleys to a large plateau and down to Setesdal, where slab-climbing nirvana awaited.

Now; onto the interesting stuff. Loe fjell, Paradise sector. On our first day out here, we were just doing single pitch to get the feel of it. We drove up to the crag and parked at what passes for a downhill ski area in this neck of the woods. There was just the one lift, going up only a few hundred feet – but they love cross-country and lots of locals are out land-training

on wheeled short skis on the tarmac cycle paths up and down the valley here. I'm a bit of a wild fruit fiend, and I've never seen so many bilberries and wild raspberries on a hillside whilst walking up to the crag! It was very difficult to keep walking and not to stop and gorge!

The minimalist bolting ethic here makes things very exciting, as there are only bolts at the hard bits, but it's the climbing of 5-6m above them at roughly the same grade that makes it feel extremely necky. Norwegian grades seem to encompass a wider variety of our grades, making judging what route to climb very difficult for starters. And in this valley, there is the added complication of an "E grade" – not to be confused with the British grading system! This is Hans Weninger's attempt (if you've been to Kalymnos, you might have climbed some of his routes) to indicate the severity of a red-point attempt *relative* to the difficulty of the route. A lot to unpack there even for experienced climbers, but basically it goes from E0 to E3, where E0 is well protected, E1 has longer run outs two grades below the actual difficulty of a route, E2 has longer run outs one grade below the route grade and E3 means you've got to climb at the same level as the route grade without protection. Gulp.

After a warmup on an easy N3/E0 (VDiff – I'll try and approximate the British trad grade here) to try and get a feel of it and understand the local grading system, I had a bit of a shock on the second route of the day (Hulk; N5+(E2)/E1 5a***), which although brilliant, cast me back to my Etive Slabs days in the early 90's. Here, you are looking at really minute changes of angle or for surface protuberances in order to try and accommodate boot friction. Fortunately, I forced my arse into gear and remembered how and so found Linjal ('Ruler'; N6-(E1)/E1 5a/b***) a little easier.



But then came the piece de resistance - Rockwaves (N6-(E2)/E2 5b***). The best route of its grade in the whole of the Setesdal according to the guidebook. But 5 bolts in 55m? Immaculate climbing, but the crux was moving past the 5th bolt and 7m or so above it, doing British 5b moves until it eased off towards the chain, some 12m distant. A fantastic route, and fortunately good headspace allowed me to make relatively short work of it. These are the days you live for as a climber!

At the first bolt on Rockwaves...

One important thing to note here are pitch lengths. The guidebook stated 35m for both of these routes, but they were actually more like 55m; absolutely way out!. We were climbing on 2x70m 8.5mm diameter and obviously I set off expecting to lower off; this was easily rectified

by just knotting the ropes and abbing off. I'm not sure how you can get that so wrong, given that we are talking about the best route of its grade in the valley here, not some obscure line at the end of the crag. With further experience, most pitches on multi-pitch routes here are actually a bit longer than the 60m shown on the line topos in the guidebook. At this point, I

was reminded of the on-line debate we had recently on rope lengths to purchase in the Climbing chat on WhatsApp.

Our first foray onto a big multipitch route was at Bo, in the middle of Setesdal. You can see the 1980ft slab as you drive along the 9 up the valley towards Valle from our campsite just south of Rysstad.

We parked at the end of Bo village and walked into Neverland Wall, which contained Peter Pan themed route names. We chose Smee (N4(E2)/Severe 4a***), which was the easiest and so probably the most popular. A little cairned path led up the forested hillside to a clearing on an entry slab with 3 bolts showing the line of the route. Things went easily enough until the 5th pitch, when we heard thunder. It seemed to clear a little and so we decided to press on. I'd just got to the top of the 6th pitch (crux) with some very elegant climbing when we started to get very wet indeed. Seeing as you are relying purely on friction for 95% of moves on this style of route, the next pitch looked quite wet and so we decided to abseil off (this is the way down here on all routes anyway) as we'd done all the decent pitches and it eased off after that one, with about 1100ft completed, the rest being N3/N2 basically. Being a 45-degree slab, the rope kept catching, pooling and twisting on the rock, which slowed progress but fortunately it didn't rain any more. Towards the bottom, the massive black ants started crawling up the rope again and it was amazing that we didn't get bitten! But - it was a great route for such an easy grade; minimalist bolting (7-9 bolts in 60m pitches) but all at exactly the right place. If you slipped/greased off, you'd go a long way and perhaps lose a lot of skin, as it was an E2 (not British grade, remember!). We also had a first glimpse of a lemming – we found several strangely dead ones on the track on our way back. Wild fruit was again in abundance; wild raspberries and strawberries lined the lane in and out of the village.



After a rest day to recover from the 1100ft foray in the heat, we made our way back up to the peerless Loe fjell, and in particular, sector Star. I had my eye on two routes; Idrett N6-*** and Rockstar N6+***. Having located the first one, it went relatively straightforwardly (if a bit tricky) at first and out of sight of the belayer, but once the amazing quartz streak crept in at 20m, it was pretty much full-on balls out British 5c with a 5m respite on the slightest of corner features to the chain, a further 40m+ away with very spaced bolts. From the last bolt to the chain, there must have been 7-8m with British 5c moves to pass the bolt for 3m until it eased off a bit.

The start of Idrett; tricky moves to gain a scoop above

Some absolutely brilliant climbing and not N6-; more like hard N6 and seemed to us possibly E3 5c British. It managed to wear a small hole in the end of my right-hand index finger, such was the repeated nature of the tiny pocket holds on the slab. Not so bad for an old git with

chronic osteoarthritis in his right big toe - ah, the power of steroid injections and inspiring lines to climb!

Again, the pitch length was incorrect; not 55m and more like 63, as we climb on 2x70m 8.5's. Very naughty, as most will only have 60m x 9mm twins. Sports climbers with 80m single ropes would struggle to easily escape the route too. There are no intermediate ab stations either. The bloke who wrote the guidebook needs to sharpen his act, basically.

Having done all that in 28C heat, I decided not to attempt Rockstar, as Idrett had been hard enough and to do a harder one would have really been asking for trouble! I'm not sure I can actually climb much harder at the moment, not having done much this season, but this very much used to be my style of climbing many years ago (between 20 and 35 years ago!). I am therefore grateful to get back into it in such an inspiring place.

We settled for a classic N4/E1(Severe)*** called Heskedans, which was exactly what was required. Despite carrying 3 litres of drink, it was again not enough, so we gave it best and went back to the campsite for a shower. We had a nice evening out at the Solvgarden Hotel in Rysstad, just up the valley from our camp spot, and a good opportunity to immerse ourselves in local culture. Moose carpaccio (excellent) followed by salted and smoked lamb, a traditional Setesdal method. H had local trout. We just had soft drinks, as the drink-driving limit here is bugger all, which was a shame with local brews up from 7% up to 10.5% (Imperial stout) being on the slate. Contrast this with not being able to buy 3.5% beer in the shop on a Sunday!

There was also a folk gig in the bar when we'd finished, a good end to the day. Setesdal folk music is unique (18th Century), even in Norway and as such is recorded on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Mostly played on Hardanger fiddle (Norway's national instrument), but also the harp. It's a very austere style, just single instrument and also there are solo vocals, known as "stev", which are four-line poems often sung as dialogue between individuals, as was the case with this gig. An interesting end to the day.

Going to sample another multi-pitch, we then had a fantastic day on Løefjell Open Sector, climbing Smykkestein N5+(E2)***/HVS 5a. A brilliant route of 455m / 1470ft which translates into English as "Gemstone", and for sure, it most definitely was. Pitch 3 was the crux; 55m of brilliant climbing with 3 distinct cruxes (an overlap, a tiny corner like Diagonal on Dinas Mot and a another high-stepping overlap), protected by only 7 bolts. After this, a fabulous rose quartz vein (unprotected; probably British 4b) led leftwards to a penultimate bolt before the belay arrived; an amazing pitch. Some more great and varied climbing on easier pitches as the angle eased off eventually led to the top, from which you abseiled back down again; descending took about 2.5 hours. An absolutely brilliant route – which was a masterpiece of route-finding and minimalist bolting. It's very safe to say that Setesdal is a Norwegian mini-Yosemite full of amazing slab climbing and a venue we can heartily recommend, but you'd need a reasonable level of competence and perhaps more importantly, a cool head to get the most from it, even if you just did the single pitch routes.



Above the overlap on P3 of Smykkestein (HVS)

Ab descent from Smykkestein on the easy top slabs

With two days of driving, we then moved up to Romsdal via Lillehammer, where we stayed at the Olympiaparken on the site of the Biathlon course. As well as Downhill, GS and AC skiing events, I also follow Biathlon a little on Eurosport (now sadly gone; how will I ever get my fix of Sofia Goggia, I ask??).

A lung busting ski effort, followed by a dramatic slowing of the heart rate to hit five tiny targets. I stood at the spot where they would take aim; either prone or standing. I couldn't even see the targets, let alone try to hit them! I know they've got telescopic sights, but I now had even more respect than I did previously for those who take part. Various people were out land-training on roller-skis on tarmac tracks in order to keep their fitness levels up over the summer. The next morning, we went to find the ski jumping hills, which were located nearby. As we arrived, a full practice session involving many national teams was just getting underway. Unbelievably, you could walk down the steps on the sides of the take-off run and walk under the take-off point itself to witness the best jumpers on the planet. Coaches were giving the odd instruction or two to the athletes as they passed the small stand at the take-off point whilst coming back up on the chairlift. There's no way you would ever get to be this close to the action, even at a proper event like a World Cup meet or the Olympics, so we considered ourselves extremely fortunate to have witnessed it, even to the point of asking a couple of questions as some of them walked down to the small hill from the chairlift. Ask me to show you the videos if you are interested.

Driving from Lillehammer to Donbas and onto Andalsnes following a fantastic valley, we eventually reached Romsdal, which according to the new *Crag Climbing in Romsdal* guidebook, is “Norway’s most complete climbing area” and “the most awesome place on the planet”. These are indeed some mighty claims. I think Lofoten might have something to say about the former, but the latter is perhaps only matched in my experience by Yosemite and Milford Sound on NZ’s South Island, so yes, it’s certainly right up there in terms of scale and grandeur. I’d booked a pitch at Trollveggen Camping, which is situated directly under Troll Wall, which is 3600ft of pure malevolence, rising up from the valley floor to a reach phenomenally jagged skyline.

There are maybe 4-5 routes on it, mostly not repeated due to much objective danger (such as rockfall) and prevailing weather conditions. Let’s put it this way; there isn’t much of a path up to the foot of it where the routes might start and the memorial to dead climbers and BASE Jumpers at the visitor centre might be slightly off-putting for many! Even top climbers give it a swerve and the routes on it aren’t covered by the guidebook.

Next page photo – The Mighty Troll Wall...



The mighty Troll Wall

We passed an obvious crag on the way in (Hornaksla), which had three massive bands of rock interspersed with two massive slanted and sloping ledges, and looked brilliant. But the incessant rain, seepage lines and very low cloud when it eventually does stop rendered it all out of bounds, certainly for much of the duration of our stay there; we'd been very lucky with the Scandi heatwave thus far! However, we did manage to get some climbing away from the mountains out at Hahammaren, on Eresfjord. Although only 18 miles away, it took 1 hour 20 to drive around the edges of the massive lakes to get there, then over a 500m pass with immense mountain views. This was various slabby granite 30m sport routes by the lake next to the harbour, from F4c to F6a (this book confusingly - but rationally – deals with French grades for both sport and trad routes). Some of the wet streaks had dried out by the time we had finished as the sun had got onto them, and thankfully we had managed to salvage something to keep ourselves sane.

We'd now got fed up with the poor weather and so having a van, we opted to move 3 days earlier than planned. I'd prebooked nearly all of the campsites on our itinerary, but there didn't seem to be too many people about and there'd probably be less the further north we travelled, so we set off for Lofoten, hoping for the weather to improve. Once out of the mountains and back along the E136 towards Dombas, it certainly did and we had an impossibly scenic 3 day drive up the E6 and through the Arctic Circle to Lofoten, stopping at some lovely sites, including one ran by a Sami family on their farm. They had a little restaurant attached which served their own local produce, which comprised reindeer, blueberry tart and a local IPA. The girl that ran it had a grandfather who used to be a reindeer herder, the principal occupation of the Sami, as they are a nomadic people who range horizontally across the somewhat vertical borders of Norway, Sweden and Finland. His take on time was quite fascinating; we tend to watch the clock, as we've always got to be somewhere. The old-school Sami understand that time is something that happens to you, and that things come and go when they are ready – a cyclical idea of time that's also common to Native American groups such as the Hopi.

Amidst the beautiful terrain, we listened to Yes's classics like Close To The Edge and Awaken whilst driving. I'd already read Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* on a rest day earlier in the trip, as CTTE had been inspired by it – why it had taken me so long to read it (nearly 50 years) is another story. Hesse (after spending many years immersing himself in Buddhism) came to the conclusion that time is an illusion, and that what we are seeking is actually right in front of our eyes – “close to the edge, down by the river – seasons will pass you by, I get up, I get down”. Piecing it all together – the world finally became very much clearer.....



Finally, we arrived at Bognes to take the Lodingen ferry (one per hour and the princely sum of 11 Euros) and so arrive on Lofoten, where we'd planned to spend 10 days climbing a few classics in the phenomenal surroundings we'd

seen in that guidebook we'd purchased all those years ago. Unfortunately, it had started to rain after a fantastic evening's sunset, and this somewhat set the tone for what was to follow.

After getting a pitch at a site and a quick reconnaissance drive to the main crags, we were ready. But an overnight deluge (rain so loud on the van we couldn't hear Lowri whilst FaceTiming us from NZ), it finally cleared up enough to go out climbing in the afternoon. We tried the Pianokrakken area, but some terrible parking in the very limited spaces available prevented us from doing so. Plan B was Finnvika, fortunately just as the tide was going out (Rockfax 2017 being incorrect in saying it wasn't tidal). A great spot with some excellent rock and some quality sport routes.

After a few more days of poor weather, the gods saw fit to grant us one day without some sort of rain, so we took advantage with a visit to the West Face of Pianokrakken and an ascent of the Pianohandler Lunds Rute. Very varied climbing and a multitude of different techniques were required across all of the pitches; probably about VS 4c and a Top50 Lofoten route. A brilliant day and views, which served to remind us why we do it; I was somewhat beginning to forget!



After this particular day, the forecast for the next 10 days looked particularly dire. Not wishing a repeat of the previous 5 days, we decided to escape and find some sun, which, after all, is one of the major points of having a motorhome after all. We thought we'd be smart and drive the length of the archipelago and get a ferry to Bodo from Moskenes. That would cut out quite a bit of driving back down through Norway itself. Trouble is, a lot of people have the same idea and are willing to queue for literally hours on end, as the ferries are relatively infrequent (compared to Lodingen/Bognes, the ferry to Bodo is every 5-6 hours) and 50% capacity had already been sold for the foreseeable future, with the rest on a first come first served basis. Unwilling to wait 5 hours for the next one, then drive at 0030 from Bodo, or even come back at 0600 for the 0700 and risk not getting on etc, we drove back (now in the rain, as skilfully predicted by Yr) to find a site in which to rest up and let the rain pass.



This shot was taken the morning after, but by lunchtime and arrival at the Moskenes ferry, it was tipping it down. West coast weather, eh?

From the tip of the Lofoten peninsula - well over 2000km and 24 hours' worth of driving later (over 4 days, mainly in the rain except for the Pianohandler day and half of the day before) - we arrive in southern Sweden at a nice, remote and peaceful village campsite next to the sea. We retraced our steps at two campsites on the E6 en route, then stayed at a slightly more salubrious one than on the way up (although very "touristy".....the sort of place that fine weather non-campers head for on good weekends) at Lillehammer. Well, it was only the one night!



That lovely light when approaching the coast... And a blissfully quiet, warm sandy beach.

Onwards back into Denmark. We figured that we were probably never going to come this way too many times again, and so we planned to spend our rainy Lofoten time exploring somewhere we'd never been. We spent a fabulous day walking around Copenhagen - what a fantastic and beautiful city! We found a reasonable urban campsite with grass pitches that was a short walk from a main bus ride into the heart of town. We had a good meal out at a

decent restaurant on our first evening (it had been a while; Norway is a bit of a culinary disaster, darling) but we were back in the next day to see the sights, and there's certainly lots to love. Brilliant architecture, both old and contemporary, and a fantastic use of public space. One thing to note - this is very much a bike-friendly city; very much more than others that might claim to be.

Later on, we visited the uber-classic Tivoli Gardens ([Tivoli Gardens Amusement Park – magical experiences for the whole family](#)) to see what classic Danish entertainment for all ages and across the ages looks like. We had dinner there and there was a free live band to finish - there's also a variety of concert halls and stages within the venue, catering for all sorts of musical styles.

We also had some fascinating days delving a bit more into Danish culture. First up, a visit to the Viking Ship Museum at Roskilde ([Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde](#)) where several scuttled ships over 1000 years old were discovered in the early 1960's, just a few miles from where we were kayaking the day before. We took a tour, and our anthropologist guide told us all about it. Very informative and entertaining. After an excellent lunch, we visited another UNESCO site at Stevns Klint ([Stevns Klint - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#)) at which they used to mine lime. It's also one of the biggest cliffs in Denmark, but then again, that's not very big as we discovered; the highest point in Denmark is about 170m! One thing I learned that I never realised from all of this was that the Vikings were big news in Dublin! 🇮🇪

Then another UNESCO World Heritage Site, this time at Mons Klint ([Møns Klint - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#)), which has a very unique geology. I've seen a lot of "limestone" areas in my time, but none as weird as this. The highest cliff was probably around 40m and the whole area is about 120m above sea level. Great to see an alder forest on top of it with some very old specimens. We were completely unaware of all of these places, so it was great to search them out and dig into the country a little bit.



Stevns Klint



Mons Klint

Working our way back further, we kept out of the big German cities as you now need environmental accreditation to get into them with diesel motorhomes, even with ours as a Euro 6. Hamburg would have been ideal to visit, but the roadworks surrounding it are a bit of a joke, even amongst Germans themselves. In fact, all roadworks across Germany are just a joke to them, such is the almost glacial pace of progress to finish any of them (and we thought we were bad!). So, we settled for Flensburg, near the Danish border. Nice and quiet, and picturesque. Then onto an obscure campsite at Lauenbruck for our last night of sleeping in the van before visiting our German ski friends Dani & Jurgen, whom we met in the Dolomites in March.



The harbour at Flensburg



Lauenbruck

We had a couple of nice days chilling out around the lovely local town of Xanten in Germany, near Hunxe, where they live. We had a good catch up, made a few plans and not having to drive for hours on end was particularly nice! Their place is only 2.5 hours from Rotterdam, which is perfectly placed! I found a very nice wine merchant some 20 minutes from their house on the way back, and I took some good recommendations on restocking the back bedroom. I always like to get what you can't buy here in the UK, and if you spend the same amount of money per bottle there as you do here, then you get a far better wine for your cash. We got to the ferry in the late afternoon and boarded quickly. A shower and a good meal, followed by a good sleep (we'd got used to the engine vibration) and early breakfast saw us straight through Blighty border control by 0730.

Although reviewing the photos makes it seem like we had phenomenally sunny weather, there was a two-week period when we never actually saw much of the sun! However, it was fantastic trip and one we'll never do again in all probability, but it was worth doing to have been amongst such grand scenery, doing our own thing and now that we have retired, at our own pace to explore these fascinating countries in more detail.

Lessons Learnt

If you love granite slabs, Setesdal is a European nirvana. It's got much better weather than the rest of Norway too. There's single and multipitch routes to suit all difficulties, but the climbing style does require a steady head in order to go long distances above the strategically-placed bolts, so it's an acquired taste that's probably not for everyone.

Lofoten is absolutely fabulous, but it's stupidly popular in the 24-hour daylight months of June and July. You will apparently be lucky to get a pitch or accommodation during this time these days. From a practical climbing perspective, there used to be more parking spaces for climbing in the key areas, but the road-widening scheme to improve the road to Henningsvaer took a lot of these out, so if you have a motorhome like us (even a small one at 6m long), you will struggle greatly to park it in order to get any climbing done. With a car or smaller van, you obviously stand far more chance.

There's not too much wear at the base of routes yet, even at the most popular areas. It's clearly never going to be a Kalymnos or Leonidio as it is way above the Arctic Circle, but it was somewhat refreshing to see a more pristine environment.

Norway in particular is completely set up for motorhomes. I'd planned the trip using Google Maps and this just showed up the proper paid campsites; mainly because I asked it to, I suppose! I was under the impression that there was a lot of tundra and not much habitation, and whilst this was true in some respects, it wasn't the true reality. Many villages and towns (even though they are very much far apart distance-wise) have free sites to park up at for the night with grey-water and chemical toilet facilities. We emptied the chemical toilet using a free machine near Lodingen, which was pretty unbelievable. They'd rather make it free so that people didn't dump it in a nearby hedge. Ah, the foresight and benefits of having a Sovereign Wealth Fund from all of that North Sea oil money – don't get me started!

Electric vehicle drivers needn't have range anxiety here either – there's always shedloads of charging points, no matter where you are. EV's were quite heavily subsidised by the Norwegian government to gain traction, and the infrastructure has been built accordingly.

There's quite a few toll roads in Norway, especially en route to Lofoten. There's no way to physically pay, apart from going onto their website. We registered a little late and couldn't see where we'd been or how to pay. A neighbour across the road from us said they'll send us a letter about it, but at the time of writing, that seems to have eluded us (thankfully).

You can book your crossing of the Oresund Bridge in advance – this saves you around 50% of the cost that you'd incur if you just turned up – like we did on the way there. Who knew!

