

Anne and Ken's North Sea Route

Hook of Holland to Bergen

16 May to 26 July 2002

72 days

3344 kms (2090 miles)

There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.

Day 1 Thursday 16th May Weymouth to Harwich

After a mass of preparation and arrangements it was good to be on our way. The tandem, dismantled into three pieces, fitted nicely into the hire car and the trailer went on the back seat. Next Anne had an armful of blood taken for her last doctor based INR test. It was far too nice a day to spend on the M25 and perhaps we really should just have pedalled to Harwich. However, even we have some kind of time limits and we wanted to do all of the European part of the North Sea route from the Hook of Holland to Bergen in Norway. So a circumnavigation of London will have to wait for another time. Perhaps a very long time. Having dumped the car we put the bike together and had a little ride to look at the Harwich sights before boarding the ship. Stena don't advertise that they take bikes on the overnight ship but they do. Thanks Colin. And a very nice crossing it is too, with a good dinner and breakfast included in the price and a pleasant cabin. Furthermore the management did not even get seasick.

Day 2 Friday 17th May Hoek van Holland to Zandvoort (Sandsfoot is near where we live in Weymouth)

We were awoken by a stream of Dutch at 6.30am local time. We did not like this very much. But we showered and, not being prepared to miss a free breakfast, went up to the buffet. Full English has nothing on full Dutch and we filled our doggy bag with enough for lunch. We were last off the boat at 8am, a time which the stoker in her current life is barely aware of. We were a bit disappointed that after leaving the boat there were no signs to the "Noordzee Route LF1" from the dock gate. We consulted the map and took a minor road parallel to the shipping channel going north west. The management had a job to get his head around this, being completely disorientated by the way the boat had come in. Fortunately it was a lovely morning and we took our direction from the sun. After a km or two we suddenly found that we were on cycle route LF1(b) which is the North Sea route going north. The first part of the route was along tarmac between dykes amongst kms and kms of greenhouses. Perhaps we had better say at this stage that our cycle computer is now set to kms and that we see ourselves as Europeans. If you are a flat earth Union Jack waving Britisher who regrets the tunnel and wants to stay out of the Euro you may not like the rest of this diary.

The cycle route is extremely well signed and almost entirely on well paved tracks. Motor vehicles, with the exception of mopeds, are not allowed. Being British cyclists, a hardy lot that need to support each other, we waved to the few people we met on our way on their standard Dutch bikes. The response to our waves, though not unfriendly, was limited. As the morning progressed we began to realise why. This route is busy and not with dog walkers and kids in push chairs but bikes. You can't wave to everyone so we stopped waving and tried to avoid

drowning in a sea of bikes. They were of all types, normal, roadies, recumbents and us. Passing through the large town of Den Haag was a doddle. It was so easy to follow the signs that the stoker is talking about taking up navigation. (We are not sure what union rules would apply if she does but the management is not very worried.)

After Den Haag we were in the sand dunes for the rest of the day. Not only was the route tarmacked for much of the way but even had cycle calming by way of humps called dremples and cobbles for short bits near to bends and junctions. We took lunch in the almost too warm sunshine before pressing on to Zandvoort. Having bought supplies at a rather grumpy supermarket the management enquired about campsites. The stoker is not yet fluent in Dutch so we were forced to use English. Following the very good directions from a friendly local lady we found our site on the dunes. We don't like the sand and hope that the tent will stay up but the red wine and nice dinner should ensure that at least the management will not worry one way or the other.

Day 3 Saturday 18th May Zandvoort to Petten

We awoke to a threatening sky and it was tempting to pack up straight away, but then the stoker needed her tea and the management his breakfast. By the time we were both happy it had started to rain. There was little wind and it rained heavily for about half an hour. This made packing up a sandy and unpleasant business. According to the altimeter on the computer the camp site was three metres below sea level. We certainly needed low gears to get up to the road between it and the sea. Having rejoined the cycle route the scenery was much different from yesterday. We started by going through a wooded park before passing some very opulent looking mansions to reach the ferry at Velsen Zuid. This took us across the wide river which takes vessels into Amsterdam which is only 20km away. The ferry was free for bikes and in the five minutes or so we waited for it to come another half a dozen cyclists turned up. We chatted to a family from Amsterdam out for a long weekend cycle camping. Father had the younger child on a seat on his crossbar and carried the camping gear on a Bob trailer. Mother had the older one on a trailer bike. It was a nice arrangement and after we left the ferry they certainly went faster than us.

The rain held off long enough for us to have lunch on one of the many seats along the way deep in a forest. After lunch we got lost for the first time. The stoker was no help and is no longer sure whether she is going to learn navigation. In fact the signs were correct but we had got so used to them being almost stoker proof that we went the wrong way. It was also less than encouraging to go the right way, on a cycle route beside a main road, when so far we had been almost entirely on special trails or very minor roads. Back on tracks we were soon into the sand dunes again. Even though it was nothing like as busy with bikes as yesterday one could not safely take a wee without going into the bushes. This is especially true because, unlike cars, you can't hear bikes coming. For the last 5km we cruised along at 20 plus km per hour with a following wind. The road was behind a dyke perhaps 30 metres high, holding back the sea from the flat farm land. For the first time we had a typical Dutch scene. Flat green fields with old fashioned looking windmills, their sails turning rapidly in the stiff breeze, presumably working the pumps. We were pleased to see the large sign advertising our five star camp site. We were soon checked in and established ourselves on a pleasant flat grassy pitch with no sand. It is rather odd to be surrounded by much larger tents and caravans but it's nice to have the facilities.

Day 4 Sunday 19th May Petten to Reddingboot (North tip of the island of Texel)

Nice sunshine today and a good following wind made for some speedy cycling. The stoker, however, seemed reluctant to leave the comfort of the camp site. We have noticed before that as we get used to travelling we tend to take longer to pack and leave each day. It could be how

travellers eventually end up as settlers. We caught the lunch time ferry at Den Helder to the Island of Texel. It would have been nice to know that we could get from Texel to Vlieland and then back to the mainland but that information is not available. We travelled on hopefully and optimistically as usual, confident it will all work out and we won't have to come back.

Texel is completely flat with sand dunes to the west and a dyke to the east. The usual signs no longer seem to apply but the island is covered in cycle routes which brings with it its own problems. Like the Rodwell Trail in Weymouth, giving a route a name does not give a visitor the slightest idea of where it goes. Here the stoker gave up navigation and the management, in the absence of a decent map or GPS, took to using his compass. We made it to the north end of the island the pretty way and even cycled for 5km on a slope a bit like a velodrome along the seaside of the east dyke. The management thinks that the stoker may have been too frightened to complain. Having crossed the island against the wind we then made for the camp site nearest to the ferry, again it was very pleasant. That is apart from the proprietor to whom we didn't take and the fact that we had little food and he had no shop. Having pitched the tent we walked up to the ferry "house", a shed on the sands. Monday (tomorrow) was gesloten (closed) and the next ferry was Tuesday morning. We used part of the emergency rations for dinner, we carry dried meals for just such eventualities, and enjoyed a very peaceful night away from it all.

Day 5 Monday 20th May Rest day at Reddingboot (North tip of the island of Texel)

While it is a bit early to have a rest day we enjoyed a lie in and leisurely breakfast eating up what was left. The management carried out the first blood test on the stoker. Her exertions seemed to have changed her blood so she now needs less rat poison for a few days. We then cycled the 5kms into the local village which has most of the shops holiday places have and several cafés. Unfortunately the supermarket was closed so we cycled off to a very large camp site with a shop only to arrive just as it was closing for the day. Our luck was not in and we confirmed that it was a public holiday. Furthermore they obviously take their bank holidays very seriously here, what with closing shops when the place is full of customers and not running a ferry on what could be a very busy day. We did however find two tiny fishing stools in a camping shop which should make life more comfortable. After lunch we returned to the camp site to find many of the pitches empty. We moved to a more sheltered spot to keep out of the by now very strong wind and did tidying, sorting and chores. Having no food in the tent we returned to the village for a pizza which the management thought was very nice but gave the stoker the trots. He also thought that the frequent trips to the toilet block could only serve to strengthen the stoker's legs.

Day 6 Tuesday 21st May Reddingboot to Oost-Vlieland (North tip of the island of Vlieland)

Even though the stoker had recovered all was not well. Having got up early, rushed to the village for supplies, broken camp and got to the ferry for 10am we were told that only the 5pm ferry took bikes. The stoker tried to negotiate but all in vain. We went to the village for some coffee and spent the rest of the morning trying to locate some methylated spirit for our cooker. The stoker was also able to recover one or two bits and pieces she had left in the shop when we bought the stools. We then found a very nice sheltered spot in the sand dunes to have our picnic lunch and wait for the ferry. We, together with four other cyclists, were eventually allowed on board. This was done by walking along a rickety jetty 100 metres long and two metres above sea level. It was just wide enough for the tandem and supported by what we think are the trunks of willow trees with rope hand rails. Moored alongside the ferry was a Dutch sailing barge. The management got talking to the crew and was invited on board for an inspection. Being a sailor he found this vessel, built as a pilot barge in 1906, very interesting.

The ferry made its way across to Vlieland in about 20 minutes. Facilities for disembarking were similar to those for boarding. However at the end of the jetty was a vehicle which was a cross between a lorry, a tractor and a bus. The six of us and our bikes boarded and were transported for 6kms across soft sand to the road. We then cycled to the other end of the island on its only road beside the sea. This whole area is full of wild life of all sorts but we have never seen the variety or numbers of sea birds as were there. We checked that the ferry does actually go to the mainland tomorrow and then went to the camp site. This is a very odd place in the sand dunes. In theory it has lots of facilities. In practice most of these were closed. It seemed also to be a graveyard for permanently pitched tents. Their long exposure to the elements had bleached out all the colour. To make matters worse the toilets were dirty. There was also the odd group of teenagers roaming the site who though unable to speak English had obviously picked up a good number of our more unpleasant swear words. A very odd thing to find in what is such a beautiful spot.

Day 7 Wednesday 22nd May Oost-Vlieland to Holwerd

We packed up slowly in the rain. It was the first proper rain we have seen so far this trip. We did a blood test and warfarin seems to be under control. We cycled slowly past reception on the basis that if we were not stopped we had no intention of paying for such smelly facilities. No-one was around, and we arrived at the ferrydock in a few minutes. The stoker enquired about the fast ferry to the mainland but it did not take fietsen (bikes) so we waited until 11.45am and took the normal car ferry. We passed the time watching the locals cycling in the rain. Most amusing was a tandem with the stoker in control of an umbrella. The management was very envious.

It was a very pleasant voyage on the ferry taking an hour and three quarters. It was calm with lots of sailing boats to look at. Many of these had lee boards though not all looked like Dutch barges. We left the boat at Harlingen in the rain and soon found the North Sea cycle route signs. Harlingen, with its typical Dutch canals, buildings and marinas, looked a very lovely place. We felt it was best seen when it is not raining and after a rest day (or so) the management was keen to press on. After navigating a massive building project at the edge of town we were soon in the quiet agricultural countryside. We have to mention that even Dutch cycle route signing is not always quite right and near this site we ended up in a heap of sand. However, unlike the Rodwell Trail, once we found the diversion it went on for at least 5km on specially laid smooth tarmac.

Cycling in the rain is much easier if one has our 1999 UK End to End (Land's End to Muckle Flugga) to remember. Today, even though it was raining we had a following wind and it was not cold. Life on the road is not so bad. We stopped in a bus shelter to take a break and were overtaken by a British cyclist from Horndean - Peter Dawson. He is an ex racing man and a member of the Hampshire Road Club, planning to do the whole North Sea Route including the British half in about half the time we are taking. We cycled on together and it was nice to be in company till we split at Holwerd. He went off to an L&O (Dutch B&B) and we to our nice clean and quiet camp site, except for the church bells which we hope will be turned off before we go to bed. We felt very proud putting the tent up in the rain and cooking dinner but it was especially nice that it stopped raining and we could dry out a bit before bed time.

Day 8 Thursday 23rd May Holwerd to Uithuizen

After yesterday's rain we were pleased to see an overcast but not threatening sky. The camp site boy who kept the toilets in superb condition (does he want a job in Weymouth) said he was going to razor the grass we had been camping on once we were gone. Can't say we made an early start but once on the road we were back on the route pedalling beside the dyke next to the sea. Up until now we have always been friendly towards sheep which are generally stupid but harmless. These sheep were obviously kept to keep the grass down on the dyke and were extremely fat and

lazy. We ended up having to herd them out of the road. But much worse was cycling through kms of sheep shit. By the time we left the dyke there were little blobs of it everywhere. The stoker will probably be cleaning it off for weeks.

This part of the route is nothing like as heavily populated by bikes as some earlier sections and lots of it is on minor roads. Just before lunch we took a diversion on cycle tracks beside a sea dyke. Lunch beside a dyke was very pleasant on a well placed seat in the sun, although slightly spoiled by the army gun fire in the background. After lunch we cycled through military land. The stoker was upset by having to cross at fairly frequent intervals army roads covered in deep sand. The management was determined to try to pedal through but his lack of success usually ended in a rapid dismount which the stoker felt contravened her rights. We finally ended up having to cross a major dyke by steps with channels for cycle wheels in the side. The only other place we have been unfortunate enough to see this unpleasant system is in Reading. At least here it was necessary. After this we had twenty or so bum numbing kilometres across flat open farm land but at least the wind was basically on our side. Uithuizen is a very pleasant small town with nice buildings, quiet streets and its own waterway. We found the camp site where we were not expecting it with a little difficulty. It was however well worth it. It is a small site with excellent facilities and a very pleasant couple running it.

Day 9 Friday 24th May Uithuizen to Emden in Germany

Awoke to bright sunshine and the stoker had great difficulty removing her eye shades. She feels these are essential for camping. Breaking camp was easy in such good weather and we were all set for an early start. That was without taking into account the friendly and talkative Dutch. The stoker took two plates and cups to wash up and came back half an hour later. Still, that's one of the nice things about travelling, the people you meet. Once on the road we had a strong head wind to contend with. It was OK in the villages where there was some shelter but very slow going out in the countryside. It was a bit like a continuous ride over Beach Road to Portland on the average Monday. The signing on this part of the route was not as good as we had come to expect and we wondered whether in the interests of European competition the work of signing had been awarded to Sustrans. I suppose we have to be grateful that they did not also get the job of building the route which at least was well up to standard.

We arrived at Defzijl at lunch time and were lucky to find that the thrice weekly ferry to Emden was leaving at 3pm. This must be one of the most unlikely international ferries. Firstly the stoker only managed to find it moored half way down a long jetty in this large port by enquiring at an office building. They only managed to locate it by phoning the harbour master. The boat itself was small, capable of taking about 40 people and very old and traditional. We did not save many kms on this ferry, just a very long afternoon's slog against a strong head wind.

We arrived at Emden at a deserted quay where the ferry stopped just long enough for us to disembark. There was no sign that we had entered Germany at all let alone any customs post. Furthermore it was a desolate place in the rain squall which chose to come through just then. We made for shelter in the town centre PDQ and decided to find the local youth hostel rather than camp in this weather. We had found the Dutch people to be so friendly and helpful and had not really expected the Germans to be the same. In Emden we were wrong. We were guided to the hostel by a local lady on her bike who saw us studying the map. The warden and her assistant were equally nice. Much to our surprise we met Peter Dawson again at the hostel. In was a case of the snail and the hare. He had been a day ahead of us but had problems with a blown tyre associated with his brakes. We spent the evening poring over maps and exchanging information. Before we went to bed we also had a sort out and sent our Dutch stuff together with some other odds and ends back home.

Day 10 Saturday 25th May Emden to 19 Am Bach Strasse, Benersiel

Yes, by the end of the first 24 hours in Germany we had our own address. Soon after breakfast we put Peter on the road with the hope that he does not see us again this trip. The bike loaded we headed North West out of town with the usual difficulties associated with getting out of urban areas. The place was full of cycle routes but it was not clear exactly where they went. The North Sea route itself is less clearly defined in Germany and anyway the management was fed up with following some else's directions. We spent most of the day going from village to village in the countryside mostly with a nice tail wind. The management says he mainly knew where he was and the stoker was inclined to believe him when he ended up in the right place.

Along the way we came across the restored Berumerfehn windmill. We stopped to look and were invited in by the owners and their son Heinrich aged about five. The mill had been in their family for four generations. Great granddad was a sea captain from the Netherlands who had bought the mill. He then had at least seven children and bought a mill for each of them. We went to the very top of the mill by almost vertical ladders which the stoker found unsuitable. We examined the small fan type wheel at the back of the mill which turned the sails to face the wind. The weather vane on this mill is a fox. Hunting it would have been out of the question because according to family history there were no mice in the mill because the fox ate them. All this time the dare devil Heinrich was scrabbling around over drops of over twenty metres without the slightest fear. His father did tell him off now and again when he seemed especially likely to fall. The family went off to lunch and we had ours in the base of the mill while a rain squall passed by.

After lunch we made great speed onwards to the beach and on the way were again lucky to be able to shelter in a barn while a heavy squall passed by. We checked into a huge campsite on the beach. It feels a bit like Hayling Island with all the tacky facilities needed for a beach holiday. It is also incredibly regimented. We checked in and were directed to the above address. Even though none of the pitches on our side of the road was taken we got the strong feeling that to use one of the others would be a serious offence. On the other hand it has excellent facilities, all of which seem to work, and there is no sign that any kind of vandalism or misbehaviour would be acceptable. All very unBritish.

Day 11 Sunday 26th May 19 Am Bach Strasse, Benersiel to Ruttelerfeld

As we left the teutonic organisation of the campsite we wondered how the Germanic mind copes with the vagaries and bugs in Bill Gates' software. They must find it very annoying to say the least. Perhaps they will be the ones who topple him just like he did Big Blue. Let's hope so.

We had to settle into a rhythm and get used to the idea of battling against a strong headwind all day. It is very like climbing a mountain pass and only a little faster. Once we got used to the idea that we would be going much slower than yesterday and not get so far the ride became very pleasant. The first part was along a dyke and confirmed that the Germans are not nearly as good at agriculture in these low lying regions as the Dutch. Fields were often left uncultivated and where ploughing had taken place it was very inferior to the beautiful raised furrows in many Dutch fields. Still, if your country chooses to over supply the whole of the world with cars why worry about agriculture?

Most of today's ride was on cycle tracks beside roads and fairly uneventful until we started to look for somewhere for the night. A camp site was marked on the map in a forested area. Just as we passed where it should have been the skies opened. Our Cateye altimeter had been rising all day and we certainly had not been, so a low pressure area had come through and picked on us to wet. Looking around we found a gate which led into the forest and partly hidden from the road a couple of caravans. The stoker went to investigate. It was a private site and the residents

had a discussion on whether we could stay for the night. With only a few words of common language between us mime became the order of the day. Graphic demonstrations of the need to go to the toilet in the woods were given and how the water had to be pumped. With friendly farewells and unnecessary but kindly meant directions to the camp site we had passed half an hour ago we thought it best to be on our way.

Next stop was a Youth Hostel some 8km away. Getting a room was no problem, we were the only visitors and they have 111 beds. They could not give us a meal as we had not booked in advance and they do not have a member's kitchen or drying room. It would seem from talking to the very pleasant warden that most of their work is with parties of children. Unfortunately this seems to be the way that the English YHA is going and while it may be in the German tradition it is not in ours and it is a great shame. We also learned that Peter stayed here last night. He is already a day ahead of us. The warden gave us a copy of the North Sea Route poster which we had left at home by mistake, just as he had Peter. Rather than cycle the 10km round trip to a restaurant for dinner we cooked on the faithful Trangia and did the chores.

Day 12 Monday 27th May Ruttelerfeld to Brake an de Weser

As we were leaving after our huge breakfast the first group of children were moving in. We wondered if we would be able to stay at hostels during the week with school groups in even if we wanted to. The plan today is to meander east to Brake, a little town on the river Weser. It is not exactly on the North Sea route but just as far and we were getting a little tired of cycling along under sea dykes. The inland area here is very rural, quiet and pleasant. We still had mainly cross to head winds but the route was so winding to get round water courses that we had it on the nose and from behind alternately. The farmers here obviously like their comforts and not only were the many villages we passed through well protected from the weather but also most of the roads were lined with hedges and avenues of trees. As we were now navigating properly by map the pauses to check the way and the variation in direction brought a change to the cycling rhythm. This made the flat territory more acceptable on the bum, particularly the stoker's.

Having taken lunch in a field relaxing in the sunshine we made our way into Brake. The last few kms in were not inspiring but once we got down to the river away from through traffic it was very pleasant. We felt we were due a break and watched out for houses advertising ferienwohnung, that is a room with a kitchen. We passed one but could not raise the occupants. Eventually we found the Tourist Information Bureau and were found excellent accommodation within walking distance of the river, shops and local port. The proprietor is a member of the Bett and Bike chain. While we were accommodated in unaccustomed comfort upstairs the tandem rested in dry luxury in the porch downstairs.

Day 13 Tuesday 28th May Rest day at Brake an de Weser

Rest days are not exactly what they seem. It gives us a chance to do some sorting out and get the washing done. This is eased here by the washing machine in the flat and the excellent kitchen. It is also the time when we plan the next few days travel and service the bike. On this occasion the bike is fine. Flat roads using few gears have not placed much strain on such a robust tandem. The management is not very happy about the amount of sand it has been near to but he can't do much about that. Sometimes on rest days we do go for a short ride but on this occasion we spent the day locally looking at the river, shops and museum. It is a very nice area. In the past it must have been a working dock area and now it clearly has a large immigrant population. The food shops reflect this and while they still stock the best of German food there is also the variety of the more interesting things we have come to expect in the UK.

Day 14 Wednesday 29th May Brake an de Weser to Bad Bederkesa

Yesterday's rain had gone away and the sunshine was so bright in our room that the stoker was reluctant to remove her eye shades. We left Brake very very clean, even the clothes we stood up in and those we wore yesterday and just about every other garment in the bag was newly washed. After about 5km we crossed the Weser by car ferry and followed a red cycle route. These are supposed to be the best. This one was not. It was on a cycle path beside a main road heavily populated by the German Army. To avoid this road the stoker suggested we took a left turn following a sign post to Bokel. We continued for some time on roads too minor to be on the map but no further sign posts appeared. The management took to navigating by compass which at least meant we were going in roughly the right direction. The result was that we ended up on an unmade sandy track heading through a wood. Not being ones who happily retrace several kms we continued through the wood and emerged on the other side. After only a short exploratory deviation we established our position without doubt and were soon back on course.

About the only interesting thing that happened in the afternoon was that a red deer put in an appearance exactly where the road sign said it would and where the stoker said it wouldn't. Consequently she did not have her camera ready. Bederkesa is a tourist resort on a large lake which presumably had once been a spa. The campsite is very pleasant and after eating we still had the energy to explore.

Day 15 Thursday 30th May Bad Bederkesa to Krautsand

As we left the camp site in the pleasant morning sunshine the stoker commented on how much she had liked the facilities here. A grumpy management who would have liked to have been on the road sometime earlier made a comment also. It was somewhat under his breath because it is not a good idea to upset the stoker before she starts work. It was to do with her level of familiarity with the facilities in view of the amount of time she had spent in them, at them and on them.

After yesterday the management was determined to stay on the very minor roads as much as possible. It may sound like cycling heaven to UK cyclists to have maps which show cycle routes in red and major roads in indistinguishable white but it is far from ideal in practice. That is unless you want to spend all day on admittedly superb cycle paths beside roaring main roads. It is very difficult with the cycling maps to ensure a peaceful ride. Today, apart from a short stretch at lunchtime, we managed to achieve this. We even came across what could pass for a small hill which came as something of a shock. It has occurred to us for sometime that this would be much better cycling country if Slartybartfast (Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy) had just ruffled it a little. I suppose the main problem with doing this is that the water would run out of the ditches and cause all sorts of problems, which is probably why he specialised in fjords. Talking of water and river crossings, just before we arrived we came across a transporter bridge, sadly a museum piece having been bypassed by a major road. The management would not have known what one of these was except that he had been watching Auf Wiedersehen Pet on the TV just before we left. The stoker of course did know, partly because of having once lived near one of the only two such bridges in the UK.

As on the whole the weather has been good we decided to carry on camping. While all sites in Germany are very good there are not very many on our route. We have a very pleasant pitch near the river Elbe and beside a nice red and white lighthouse but we are not sure how to get from here to the ferry which will take us to Gluckstadt. The stoker therefore has an extra duty which will give her good reason to stay in the facilities. That is to find someone who can tell us the quickest way to the ferry. Meanwhile we got the tent pitched just before it started to rain but dinner was cooked while the thunder rolled around and in between heavy showers. It is a good thing the Trangia works in the rain better than we do.

Day 16 Friday 31st May Krautsand to St Michaelisdonn

Today's route is either north and over a lifting bridge to the ferry for Gluckstadt or south and around the dyke to the lifting bridge. The first is 4km and the second 12km. The third possibility which incorporates both and does not bear thinking about is 20km to the ferry. The stoker interrogated a shop assistant yesterday who indicated that the bridge was permanently shut to road traffic during the week and therefore we need to do the 12km route. The management met this drunk who was admiring the tandem and asked him about the bridge. He waved his arms in several different directions at once and confused both of us before waddling off to his caravan with his can of Pilsener. We eventually went for the safe 12km option and were glad we did. Not only was the modern lifting bridge closed and vertical but there were two very sad looking cyclists stuck on the other side.

The ferry to Gluckstadt across the Elbe takes about 30 minutes and involved three large ferry boats. One at each end loading and unloading (the other way round?) and one on the way across. Once off the boat we again headed north. We were confronted by a strong headwind which brought with it a series of heavy showers. The management, who had planned this trip with a view to avoiding both headwinds and rain, thought this to be most unfair. Was it not only three days ago that we had taken a day off? Had we done this part of the ride yesterday it would have been easy. The trick he thought is to take all days off when there is a headwind. At this point his brain suffered from overheating in sympathy with the stoker's legs which ached from pedalling.

We took our lunch in a very well appointed bus shelter during a heavy rain shower. Seldom have we seen such a well engineered structure as this shelter. It was located about seventy five metres from the road along a path overlooking a very pleasant field. It gave complete shelter from the prevailing wind and rain and we were not disturbed by traffic noise. No buses came while we were there, but we assume that the driver stops at the end of the track and blows his horn or something. Actually we were quite pleased because being Germany it is just possible that the act of sitting in a bus shelter requires you to get the bus and this is not on our schedule.

Even though we were some several kms short of our planned destination we decided we had had enough at St Mick's. We had a cake, they are very good here, and went to look at the Youth Hostel, a pleasant modern building with 70 beds. We have stayed in worse rooms in three star hotels and paid five times as much. The other residents are a group of children aged about 8 or 9 and are located well away from us but they are both well behaved and pleasant.

Day 17 Saturday 1st June St Michaelisdonn to Friedrichstadt

The children in the hostel sung a very nice round at breakfast which we hummed all day. They were a choral society from the suburbs of Hamburg. Many of the parents were with them and as we left the children were singing and playing and the parents were sitting together in the sunshine making the costumes for a concert next weekend. Seems a much better idea than what we both did for our kids in splendid isolation at home.

The management realised in retrospect that yesterday the weather was at best detrimental to our journey and at worst had done no good to the stoker's legs. He took a laid back attitude to today which was made easier by pleasant sunshine and a less aggressive headwind. We progressed to the very pleasant little town of Meldorf and bought supplies for the weekend and did some window shopping. Soon after this we were deep in country lanes. In the village before we turned off we saw a stork's nest, but the photographer (stoker) failed to get a picture of the stork. The management has not seen a stork's nest since he was in Poland in 1989. It goes almost without saying that this was a very tidy nest on a special pole, not a great heap of sticks on a lamp post as in Poland. We came across a memorial and permanent exhibition of a battle which took place

there between good local peasant soldiers and Danish mercenaries. In contrast we then came onto the main road into Heide, the regional capital beside an oil fired power station. The stink horns were small by British standards. It was, however, still surprising to see it when there are so many huge modern wind generators in this part of Germany. We found a plaque which indicated that there was an oil well on the site which could account for it being there.

We exited Heide with some difficulty and had lunch on the edge of a wood in the almost too warm sunshine. Most of the afternoon was spent in very remote country lanes and tracks on open fen land. We crossed the (shut) lifting bridge into Friedrichstadt and immediately checked into the camp site in warm sunshine, sheltered from the wind by the dyke. Tent pitched we went to explore the town. It was more like Holland than any part of Holland we had visited on this trip. Two rivers join near the town and the town centre is criss crossed with canals full of small pleasure craft. The buildings are old and mainly in the Dutch style. We understand that it was built by Huguenots fleeing from France into Holland and who then moved here. For the first time the camp site had rules in Danish and a kind of English translation as well as German. Now that the stoker knows what the rules are she was able to break them by riding a four wheeled pedalled contraption intended for children. The management was more concerned that we might be considered as tramps who are not allowed. The stoker must be in a rebellious mood tonight because she also broke the management's rules for resting her legs. These rules are for her own good to ensure that she is able to pedal properly tomorrow and going for long walks to look at circus tents is not permitted.

Day 18 Sunday 2nd June Friedrichstadt to Dagebull

It dawned a lovely day, perhaps the best yet with warm sunshine and little or no wind. Packed up and on the road we followed the cycle signs out of town. Soon after this the management had a disagreement with the direction they were taking him and set off cross country. The route across fields with grass in the middle was not even signed as a cycle route but the management insisted that it was the right way. He was not far wrong as it turned out because even though it came out on a main road we only had to do 2 or 3 km before turning off onto lanes to the back entrance of Husum. We stopped here at the dockside and listened to traditional jazz being played in a converted warehouse while we ate our ice creams. It was tempting to stay but on the other hand it was also a first class cycling day.

We went west to the coast and then followed the dyke north. By now a light following wind was filling in. The many wind electro generation towers in the fields began to turn. Over the last three weeks the management has worked out that if we are heading for a tower and the wind vanes are turning clockwise the wind is with us. If the tower we are heading for is going anticlockwise then we have a headwind. This only fails for the old fashioned two armed towers for which the reverse applies but there are very few of these and therefore they don't count.

We took lunch in a strawberry field. Very pleasant but unfortunately the crop was not ready to eat. The management also failed to set it alight with the Trangia but seemed to be trying hard to do so. On the way we stopped at Schluttsiel to discuss ferries to the local islands but were unsuccessful and went on to Dagebull. As we neared the village we were reprimanded in no uncertain terms by a person in a beach hut for cycling in a no cycling area. We were somewhat put out because we thought we were on the North Sea Route. Later, after a careful study of the map, we realised that we should have turned off 100 metres earlier but, as has been typical in the whole of Germany, the signing can only be described as very bad. This is a great pity because the routes are there and mostly on cycle tracks, most of which are away from roads. Dagebull is a pleasant ferry port village and we checked into the nearby campsite. The sunshine had held out all day and by evening the wind got up providing a kind of searing heat which was almost too abrasive to be pleasant. Even the fresh milk from the local Spar went off and had to be taken back.

Day 19 Monday 3rd June Dagebull to Tinnum on the Island(?) of Sylt

We established much to our surprise and without very much difficulty that it was possible to island hop and end up in Denmark. The management assured himself that this would not result in any fewer kms than the mainland route, so we boarded a lunch time car ferry to the island of Amrum. We had baked potatoes and sour cream together with a certain quantity of Pilsener on the way. Very nice. We spent the afternoon in a leisurely ride on the island which consists mainly of sand dunes and long white beaches and then caught the fast passenger ferry to the Island of Sylt. This involved taking the trailer and luggage off and transporting it and the tandem down the dock steps to the ferry. We loaded over the bow while the driver kept the engine running. We were soon in open sea and passing to the west of Amrum to land at 5.30pm on the southern tip of Sylt. We then had a 20km ride to do, but as we reassembled the paraphernalia discovered that one of the spring clips which hold the trailer on had got lost. The management effected a repair using a piece of brake cable while muttering very bad language under his breath. He was watched by a couple of born again motor bikers who were seriously inferior to the originals. The latter would have helped not watched.

We then did a very rapid ride to Westerland, the main town, shunning the cycle route for the smooth road and being criticised for it by a couple of motorists. We knew and have since confirmed that here as in the UK we have every right to be on the road and at the speed we were going that was the best place to be. At Westerland we knocked on five or six doors offering apartments as we had decided to stay here for two nights for a day off. We had no success to start with and think that in this part of the world people tend to book in advance and the likes of us turning up on spec were a bit of an oddity. Either that or the management's shades and helmet put them off. They certainly do little for his street cred but do seem to work in the sun. We eventually found by chance a lady who had an apartment in the east of the town, 3km away, and settled for that. Much to our surprise we turned the TV and watched the Queen's concert at Buck House. Even though it was not a minor consideration that by coming here at this time we would not only miss all this but also the football, we did enjoy the concert which kept us up till midnight local time.

Day 20 Tuesday 4th June day off at Tinnum on the Island(?) of Sylt

This group of at least eight main islands could offer some first class island hopping if the weather is always like it has been for the past couple of days. All the islands are very low lying with long white beaches and sand dunes. They all have facilities varying from the basic to the very sophisticated on Sylt. Our apartment is more expensive than that at Brake on our previous day off. It offers much the same facilities and we had a very comfortable relaxing day. The stoker became a hausfrau and did the cleaning duties etc while the management got on with managing etc. We did wander into the town on the tandem and visited the beach. This is really nice and while the town appears modern the resort is very old. In about 1923, we think, the island was linked to the mainland by a railway built along an 11km causeway constructed for the permanent way. This is still the only way onto the island(?) except by ship. It carries cars and more importantly bikes and passengers on a shuttle service. We went to the main beach and it could have been the Mediterranean. We did however need to pay a tourist tax to stay at our apartment and without this ticket we would have had to pay to gain access to this stretch of the beach and promenade. This may sound unreasonable to British people. The beach and promenade were however very well maintained and certainly it is often suggested that Weymouth should charge a tourist tax.

Day 21 Wednesday 5th June Tinnum on the Island(?) of Sylt to Skaerbaek, Denmark

When the pretty German weather girl on TV last night showed temperatures of 23 degrees and strong easterly winds we should have taken the hint and stayed another night in our comfortable apartment and spent the day on the beach. We remember saying something similar after a particularly difficult day in the Outer Hebrides in 1999. Ever since we have said we would never do anything similar again but obviously once a fool always a fool. So we packed, paid the bill and headed westwards for about 3km. We then turned right and into gale force head to cross winds as we cycled to the northern tip of Sylt. We again had the company of many cyclists. Mind you most of them must have been in their seventies. Many were so deaf that a tandem with momentum ringing both its bells frightened them out of their wits. They either got off and panicked or worse stayed on and panicked. This island must be the geriatric capital of North Germany. Those on their bikes were the younger ones. It was hard to tell whether those in the special beach chairs they have here were dead or had just stopped moving. It is however a lovely place to stay and highly recommended, in good weather.

We battled our way onwards to List and bought ferry tickets to Havneby on the island(?) of Romo. We had our picnic lunch in the ferry terminal and it was a relief to get out of the wind. A good sized car ferry took about an hour to take us and very few others from List into Denmark.

Almost as soon as we landed we noticed the difference between here and Germany. The Scandinavian influence on almost everything was so apparent. Even after all the countries we have been to it still surprises us that just by moving a few kms across a border everything changes. The one thing that didn't change was the gale force wind from the east. Having already battled against side and headwinds most of the day we had to do the last 15km directly against the gale force wind across an open causeway with no protection or even places to rest. Reduced to almost walking pace the management was tempted a couple of times to run off down wind and find a comfortable place to stay on the island. He is of course like most cyclists a stubborn sod. He had also checked that there was no other way off the island and no guarantee that the wind would be less tomorrow.

When we reached the little town of Skaerbaek it was completely asleep because it was a public holiday, their constitution day. We knew that the town was supposed to have a camp site and the stoker pulled out a street plan she had torn out of something and we went straight there. We usually have half a pannier full of food so that was no problem but ensuring that the tent goes up and stays up in the wind was the challenge. The lady running the site could not have been more helpful and the facilities are everything one would expect in Scandinavia.

Day 22 Thursday 6th June Skaerbaek to Saedding

The tent didn't blow down in the night and by the time we awoke the sky was blue in every direction. The wind was still strong from the east which means on average we should have a wind which is helpful. We left the camping ground cross country and joined the North Sea route at a little village near the coast called Rejsby. From here the signing was nearly up to the standards of Holland, which was much appreciated after the almost non existent signing in Germany. We were a bit short on supplies and had expected at least the larger villages to have a shop but no such luck. By now after her superb efforts yesterday the stoker was having a bad day. On a trip like this one is bound to get the odd niggle and have an occasional bad day. However it is not so easy to tell whether you just have bad aches and pains or something more serious if you have the stoker's leg. Still, she carried on and after lunch and a nap sheltered from the wind we both felt a bit more cheerful.

The last part of the ride was on the dyke and road into Esbjerg. For this bit we had a proper following wind and were doing speeds on the flat of up to 30kph. We managed to get supplies in a supermarket in Esbjerg but still have to try to find out how large a place needs to be before we can expect to find a shop in this country. Clearly the UK adage of church plus pub plus shop does not work here. We have passed lots of lovely white churches but the villages they are in offer nothing for the inner person.

North of Esbjerg we found a camp site and were pleased to settle in. They really have the most amazing facilities for camping in this country. There are several children's playgrounds, a small shop, camper's kitchen etc etc. We again pitched in the shelter of a hedge although the strong wind appears a little less searing. As we cooked our dinner a rather unusual Liverpudlian called Paul squeezed through a gap in our hedge. He asked for a little milk which we were able to help with. Apparently he is now from Bangor in North Wales and had come here by car to seek work on organic farms. His car had broken down and he had run out of money and was being repatriated to the UK. To make matters worse he was supposed to get the ferry today but had missed it because his train was late. He now has to wait a couple of days for the next one. We offered to share our food with him but he declined. The management almost felt that he was back in Weymouth at the CAB. Still, sometimes one has to be shall we say detached to be a CAB adviser and tomorrow is another day. Also the management can be a hard sod even when he is helping the stoker so what chance do vagrants stand?

As we write this at 10pm we are still waiting for the sun to set. We know we have to get accustomed to almost 24 hour daylight before we get to the end of this trip but adjusting takes some time.

Day 23 Friday 7th June Saedding to Bjerregard

We left a little milk for Paul, he had already gone off to the town hall to get money to pay the campsite fee. Unlike the CAB there can be no follow up in this case. We were soon back on the coast road which goes round a huge area of sheltered water near to Esbjerg. The wind was still strong from the east. Apart from being very annoying, as far as our progress was concerned its effect was more or less neutral. The stoker was back to her normal self. The blood computer said all was ok and she says her aches and pains have gone away. The sun is shining and all is well with the world. We drifted into a little town called Oksbol and found a full range of shops. We only bought cakes, lovely Danish pastries, but at least we now know what size of town we need to get supplies. We don't need to worry how many calories are in things on a trip like this. Quite the reverse - we need food for fuel and lots of it.

The management decided to deviate from the planned route because he does that sort of thing. He said it was to make the best of the wind. Whatever the reason we had a very pleasant late morning ride through 20km of heathland, not unlike the area around Bovington. We had to put up with the odd military sign but otherwise the military were completely absent. The afternoon involved a long piece of bad off road, reminiscent of many Sustrans routes in the UK. It was through lovely wooded countryside but no fun with the tandem and trailer. The management tried but could find no way round it. When we finally emerged onto a paved track it was indicative of what can be done if the authorities try. The track followed a railway line and was mainly flat and a long way from any road. The last part of the day was spent on a narrow strip of sand dunes between a huge inland lake and the sea. On the map it is called Ringkøbing Fjord but it is not the steep sided structure often seen in cruise liner brochures. We are still on relatively flat lands. We camped on a site right beside the lake. It is still very windy from the east and we hope it will go towards the south tomorrow so that we can be blown along this exposed road.

Day 24 Saturday 8th June Bjerregard to Vederso Klit

Unfortunately the wind had not changed direction but at least it had moderated a little. We started following the route signs and they took us over the sand dunes on unmade cycle tracks. The scenery was again wonderful with dunes rolling away like mountain ranges into the distance. It took a good deal of skill and effort to propel and navigate the heavily laden tandem and trailer on these tracks. The stoker particularly disliked the management's technique for dealing with sand on descents. He went for it as fast as possible on the assumption, correct most of the time, that nothing was going to stop something of our weight. We did do some short stretches on the main road particularly where the route passed through small communes of holiday homes. We stopped for a mid morning ice cream at Hvide Sande which seems to be the only place where this huge inland sea has any access to the real sea. We had hoped that the surface would improve but all hopes of this were dashed when we found an expensive looking sign advertising the North Sea route. Wherever we have been on cycle routes these signs always seem to indicate that some incompetent body has cocked up building a decent cycle path, not a very difficult task in itself. To compensate for their inadequacies they always seem to put up this type of sign. We were right and it is an especial shame here because the route itself is very pleasant.

After lunch we were again on track though the surface was a bit more acceptable. The consequences of today's ride were that we arrived at the busy modern campsite with swimming pool and other luxuries all covered in dust. We felt we looked like those cowboys in films, coming into town after a hard day. Being by the sea does have its compensations. By evening it was very calm and we walked down to the beach and watched the very slow and beautiful sunset over the sea. Not only that but the stoker took advantage of the lack of restraint required by her condition during the day to paddle in the North Sea.

Day 25 Sunday 9th June Vederso Klit to Agger

Having had enough of eating dust on yesterday's off road we set off on the main road. It was nice and smooth and with a following wind and little traffic we made amazing speed. Having achieved almost a day's ride by lunchtime we had lunch at a railway halt. Much to our amazement two trains passed on the single track but neither stopped. After lunch the gathering clouds decided to wet us. It was really just an afternoon shower but came as something of a shock after so many days of sunshine and warmth. The management was particularly pleased that we had not got complacent about packing so nothing except us got wet. We also got hills today which was really nice. The tandem began to feel like a real bike again. Even though the top speed was only about 40km per hour it was a pleasure to go downhill and pedal up with real momentum. On the flat pedalling is relentless. If you stop pedalling you stop and when you stop it takes effort and quite a time to get back up to cruising speed. Having done a reasonable mileage we took a very pleasant off road route for about 11km before arriving at the ferry at Thyboron. The surface was like the Rodwell Trail and only really acceptable to us for a short distance. It must be a false economy to make what must be a very small saving by laying this high maintenance surface instead of proper tarmac. Only non cyclists would even consider it either here or in the UK.

Having crossed the entrance to an inland waterway the size of Chichester Harbour by ferry we cycled on a dead straight flat road for 9km to get here. The map said there would be heavy traffic but we reckon we saw one car in each direction per km. We took a hut at the camp site both because we felt like a rest from camping and also the sky still looked threatening. Most Danish camp sites have these huts which have comfortable beds. The stoker is very pleased. They also have running water, electricity and basic cooking facilities and are quite cheap.

Day 26 Monday 10th June Agger to Febbersted near Hanstholm

We realised that we had lost our digital camera when we unpacked last night. It is probably down to the management and may account for why his daughter Hannah loses everything. The boy at this campsite kindly phoned the boy at the previous campsite. It had been found and would be posted to Knud's house where we should arrive in a week or so. Such is the level of honesty and trust we feel here we were not in the least surprised that it had been found and handed in.

The weather was overcast but we were pleased to see that there was little wind as we rolled out. Again we were in low lying but rolling country and no longer below sea level. We even got the occasional glimpse of the North Sea. The approved route took us through agricultural territory. Silence ruled and we only very occasionally saw a tractor or the odd person mowing in a garden. Eventually it went onto a track and we took to the only alternative, the main road. We have not experienced main roads like this since we were last in Scotland. An almost perfect surface for cycling and wide with lots of white paint. The thing it did not have was traffic. On one occasion we came across a couple of service buses going in opposite directions. The drivers had pulled up opposite each other for a conversation.

Mid morning it came onto rain. We pulled off the road and while the stoker sensibly put on full waterproofs we took shelter in a pine wood beside yet another lake. The notice said that here was the largest otter population in Denmark. They obviously did not like the rain because we did not see any. Alternatively they may have been more frightened than us to stand under trees during the thunder storm which was by now almost overhead. We moved on in the rain, the management far too restless to wait very long for the rain to stop. It was refreshing to get the rain flushing through his Shimano sandals. The chance of a dry lunch stop looked unlikely but we came across a baker's shop. They have them here in most villages like we used to have milkmen in the UK. It was shut on Mondays but had a high covered veranda with seats. From this vantage point we were able to watch the world go by while we brewed up. While we were there a school bus pulled up and deposited its load, most of whom collected their bicycles from near the bus stop and cycled off home. Throughout our trip we have seen bikes parked at bus stops, many of which provide proper bicycle parking.

In the afternoon we continued through pine forests and then sand dunes before reaching the port of Hanstholm. This is one of the largest fishing ports in Denmark but also has a shipping service to Bergen in Norway, our final destination. It was funny to think that given good luck we will get there in about six weeks and that ship will be there in 16 hours. We went on to the camp site and again took a hut - this one even has central heating to dry us off. There had been a short break in the rain but the skies were still leaden. We are due a day off but we have still not decided whether to stay here two nights. It rained almost till bedtime and we will decide in the morning.

Day 27 Tuesday 11th June at Febbersted near Hanstholm

We overslept and by the time we woke up it was really too late to start so the decision was made for us. It was a rest day. The management talked to his opposite number at reception who agreed to an extra night without problem and more if we wanted. The management said unless we moved on soon we might stay for ever. He said this was not possible as they closed on 1st October. So the tandem was washed and then hosed down at the fish gutting station. It was then checked and oiled. Emails and correspondence were dealt with as well as a walk near the sea.

Day 28 Wednesday 12th June Febbersted near Hanstholm to Fjerritslev

We left our nice hut reluctantly and late. The stoker told the friendly man running the camp site that it was her birthday. He shook her hand, wished her much happiness and said that he would not ask her age. He then instructed the management to ensure that we went out for a nice meal tonight. It was a bit fresh this morning and not long before we got the first shower of rain. Stoker went into full waterproofs with a view to holding it off which proved fairly successful to start with.

After a short spell on the fairly quiet main road we turned off onto a country road. Even though it was well surfaced it was 9km before we saw a vehicle of any kind. By lunch time we reached the highest point on the coast around here at Bulbjerg. We just made it to a 2nd World War German bunker, now open to the public, before the skies opened. We had rain, hail, thunder and lightning for over an hour and a half. Fortunately there was no attendant and so we were able to brew up and have our lunch. We had a very pleasant conversation with a Dane who was very interested in our trip. We find that the Danes we have met to be very much like the Scots - somewhat reserved at first, compared at least with the Dutch and Germans, but friendly and helpful and very proud of their country once the reserve is overcome.

Eventually we gave up waiting for the storm to abate but went on anyway. Students of literature generally read something ominous into thunder storms. The only ominous thing about this one was that we were going to get a good soaking. The next 9km were off road on a gravel track and there was no viable alternative. This kind of surface is of little use to cyclists. It is very difficult for heavily laden travellers like us and offers no challenge to mountain bikers. It has no place in a long distance cycle route. The above views are coloured by the fact that we had a front wheel puncture caused by a flint. We can't remember our last puncture on this tandem but it must be over 4000kms ago. Unfortunately the rain which had just stopped had brought out the midges. Fortunately we were still in waterproofs and put our hoods back on and showed as little flesh as possible while we changed the tube. Some discussion took place before we settled on the Youth Hostel for the night and a very pleasant meal out. It has to be said that this choice was not in any way influenced by the management. He is usually the one pressing for more comfort while the stoker, being half Scottish and also in charge of money, usually goes for economy. In this case we got the best of both worlds. It was a five star hostel with ensuite rooms and card keys etc. It is better than many hotels and especially so for wet and tired travellers. Incidentally the stoker says she very much enjoyed her birthday and was glad we cycled on. She got lots of nice birthday wishes emails and even the management managed a card and little present. The card is in Danish but he was assured it said Happy Birthday.

Day 29 Thursday 13th June Fjerritslev to Lokken

We were awoken by the thunder storm during the night and were glad we had decided not to camp. We breakfasted in our room with coffee from the foyer watching the weather girl on TV. That's this Youth Hostel for you. She was not as good as the hostel facilities. We made our way out of town on the wet roads via the bageri for our daily bread. After a stretch of main road we were again into country lanes. The management had had to devise a route because the North Sea route was mainly off road today and he did not want any more punctures or stoker aggravation. We did an extra 4 or 5km due to a slight navigational error which the management claims was unavoidable. We made Blokhus and the beach by lunchtime as the black clouds gathered around us. The approved route from here was 15km on the beach. That is not along the top of the beach on a cycle track but along the sand. Having never previously attempted such a thing we felt we had to give it a try. The beach is hard white sand and the distance from the sand dunes to the sea about 300 metres. Cars are also allowed but restricted to 30kph. It was nothing like as difficult as we thought it might be even though it reduced us to about half speed. Even the sun came out

as we went along. It was just so very pleasant with the blue sea and waves to our left and sand dunes to the right. As we got further from the start point there were few people or cars and we just had the seabirds and gently breaking waves for company. By trial and error we worked out that the nearer to the sea we got the easier it was and spent the last few kms dodging in and out of the waves. It was great fun but not without minor mishap. We did tumble off gently and the stoker's saddle did fall off but it was not her fault and soon fixed. We came off the beach and checked into a campsite. At about ten pounds to camp and thirty pounds for a hut there was no contest and we took the hut. The only jobs left to do were to wash down the tandem, get the dinner on and enjoy the evening sunshine with a glass or two of wine.

Day 30 Friday 14th June Lokken to Hirtshals

Following extensive planning and considerable negotiation between the management and stoker we now have a schedule until we leave Denmark. The importance of this today is that we are only going to do a fairly short ride, so didn't leave until 11am, what luxury. The stoker then decided that we would visit two tourist attractions. The first was a lighthouse built on a huge sand dune which had become partly buried in sand. As a tourist attraction this proved to be something of a failure. Not only was the lighthouse partly buried but also the museum and café had been forced to close because they had also become engulfed by the sand. Somewhere something had gone wrong with the planning. Actually the site was very impressive from a distance, looking like something out of the Sahara Desert with a lighthouse sticking out of it. Close up it became something of a nightmare for both bike and riders. The strong wind was blowing the sand around like snow. It got everywhere. No doubt the stoker will blame the sand in her ears for taking no notice of the management for several days to come.

The second tourist attraction was a Romanesque church which is supposed to be falling over a cliff. Very interesting no doubt if you like that kind of thing. Still it was a very pleasant spot and some of the gravestones had interesting inscriptions. On the way the front mudguard decided to fall off. This was not caused by lack of maintenance but by Robin Thorn's rather over complicated fitting becoming unbrazed from the forks. Using a Swiss army knife and the reusable wire tie used to keep thieves away from the pump it was better than new and we had not even had to get the tool kit out. In the evening the reusable wire tie donated by Charlie Halliday some years ago was replaced by a normal one so thanks to Charlie our pump remains safe from all but the most determined thieves.

Having arrived here we booked into the very nice Youth Hostel, ensuite etc, and went off looking for the money to pay for it. In all our travels we have used our debit cards to obtain money from cash machines. In every other country in Europe this has not been a problem. Here we have had several transactions "declined by card issuer". Much worried that someone had hacked into our account and got our money we improved Cellnet's profits by phoning the bank in the UK. We had not been robbed. Apparently if the machine does not get a reply to its credit check quickly enough it automatically issues that message. So our only option is to keep sticking the plastic in the hole in the wall and hope that Sweden and Norway have better systems. The whole problem is exacerbated by the UK banks being far behind their European counterparts in issuing credit card pins for use with traders. Mind you the countries we have been to do not exactly encourage credit card use. It would be hard to live on plastic alone. One wonders what the Americans do when they come here.

Day 31 Saturday 15th June Hirtshals to Skagen

It was a grey day and the first time this trip when we have started in the rain. We passed the busy commercial port which we had explored last night. Portland Port eat your heart out, and no security gate so we went right up to the ships. Soon afterwards we were in the countryside and

it was not long before the management was able to remove his waterproof feet and trousers. The rain had not quite stopped but had eased a good bit. The route today excelled itself. We did avoid a bit of the off road but otherwise followed the route completely. We did not go on a main road all day and passed through pine woods and sand dunes on good track and even tarmac. We took lunch at a rather nice picnic spot in the pouring rain. Denmark has very few places for travellers to shelter and we had not come across one for over an hour. Sod's law says that there will be one round the next bend. As we went on, after the rain had stopped, we passed a train station with a fine shelter. The stoker quickly and correctly made it clear that the management should have been aware of the station and its potential as a place to shelter.

We arrived at Skagen and took the last room in the hostel. The warden said that the English had beaten the Danes in some game or other and that this had not helped our chances of getting a room. Skagen is the northernmost part of the world for Danes. We unloaded our stuff and then took the 4km bike ride and 1km walk to the very end of the top of the country. Unlike John o'Groats it is quite impressive and nice. At the very end the management took his sandals off and his life in his hands and paddled in the two seas, the Skagerrak and Kattegat, at the same time.

Day 32 Sunday 16th June Skagen to Saeby

The wind howled around the hostel corridors during the night and was still strong from the southwest in the morning. As we are now heading south down the east coast of the top end of Denmark this was not a welcome wind. On the bright side it was a sunny warm day and we were leaving a hostel we did not like much and a touristy place which did not appeal, at least to the management. As we headed along the cycle path out of town we were overtaken by five women going at a speed which would normally be too fast for us and on bikes which looked liked shoppers. With new morning legs we stretched ourselves a bit and took the wheel of the last one. That way we got some good early kms in, and the management says their bums were not bad either. When they pulled up we managed to get the wheel of several other groups and this way not only did we make good progress but being a lone tandem there was absolutely no suggestion that we take our turn at the front. This was the first time in Denmark that we had encountered leisure cyclists in largish numbers. They nearly all seemed to be women. Most of the men we saw were on road bikes, in big groups and wearing their team strips. After lunch we were on our own and had a nasty pull against the wind stopping only for supplies and of course an icecream. We again booked into a youth hostel and this time got the full ensuite with TV. Saeby is a very attractive town with many old and interesting buildings. We particularly like the statue on the harbour side modelled on a ship's figurehead and decorated with ceramics and glass work by the local children.

Day 33 Monday 17th June Saeby to Hals

On leaving the hostel we let a crocodile of ten year old kids plus their teacher go in front of us. Nothing unusual in this except that they were, the whole class, on their bikes. We followed them at a very good pace and this was obviously part of their normal school routine. They were not off on a bike ride but going to the swimming pool, gym or just their next lesson. Very refreshing after the UK approach both to child safety and to the use of bikes. It was a nice ride along the coast today but it ended up mainly as a social day. The stoker went to the tourist office in Saeby and not only managed to get a cycle route pamphlet for the next section of the route but also booked our overnight ferry to Sweden for next Friday. We know that tourist office staff are paid to be pleasant and helpful but in our experience they seldom achieve both. Weymouth never manages it. In contrast Saeby did and we enjoyed our conversation.

We took lunch at a pleasant and very quiet little harbour call Aså. It has the unusual distinction of having its harbour on an island which has now become joined to the mainland. Here we met a one armed Danish cyclist who spoke almost perfect English. It transpired that he was on a trip down the coast to go sailing with a friend on one of the fjords. Despite having only one complete arm he was towing with his bike a trailer weighing 80kilos. We got talking about the bunkers and the German occupation and he was very interested in the subject. He said that Denmark was occupied in April 1940 because the government had failed to instruct the army to occupy the ports. He was proud that the Danish seamen with their ships had gone over to the Allies. As we meandered along in the afternoon we were overtaken by two Dutch women on a very nice tandem, which we had admired when we had seen it parked at Skagen. They had cycled up from Holland staying in the very basic campsites that are available in Denmark for the hardy. Some have the luxury of water and others not. The management has never felt that the stoker would accept this level of accommodation. They were away for three weeks and were going home on a bike bus which would carry their tandem in a trailer.

On arrival at the campsite we found that the proprietor had left his son in charge. He worked for the local council at Aalborg, the regional centre. It was twinned with Lancaster and he had just returned from an exchange working there. The stoker, having come from a town not a million miles from there, got into a conversation with him which seriously delayed dinner.

Day 34 Tuesday 18th June Hals to Stovring

Awoke to blue skies and a very warm day indeed. Knowing that we were not planning to go very far today we lounged around a bit in the sun and took a long late breakfast. We began to realise that this may not have been a good idea when the one armed cyclist we met yesterday passed us as he left the campsite all packed for his next destination. He said that temperatures of 30c were expected followed by thunderstorms. While he didn't mind the heat he wanted to have his tent pitched before the storm. By the time we left it was very hot and humid and we also had a strong headwind. The rural cross country route was nice but the going was slow. After lunch we were rewarded with two strawberries, reminiscent of what happened in Greece with oranges in 2000. A man working on his allotment picked them and running beside us gave them to us together with his good wishes. Soon the predicted storm happened. It was dramatic while it lasted but fortunately this was not for long. The wind suddenly became almost too strong to cycle against and the rain was so heavy that we barely had time to get our waterproofs on. We just managed this without getting completely soaked by sheltering in a field entrance. For the rest of the trip to Stovring we watched the locals clearing up the mess the storm had made and children playing in the water and mud. We learned later that it was exceptional and caused by some phenomenon in the North Sea.

Day 35 Wednesday 19th June Rest day at Stovring

Last night we were given a warm welcome by our friends Monica and Knud who live here. They have a lovely architect designed house in the Danish style and made us very comfortable. All this despite the fact that they are both very busy at work and that they will be leaving for a holiday in Australia in the next few days. House design here deserves a mention. Most houses are individual and many in a style which either the planners would block in the UK or would cause the builder to suck even more than usual. We think that generally they are much nicer than ours and certainly more interesting. The rest of the day was spent oiling the bike and catching up with emails etc as usual.

Day 36 Thursday 20th June Stovring to Udbyboj Vasehuse

We slept in a little. Our excuse was that Monica and Knud needed us out of the way while they got ready to go to work. It was an ideal cycling day, not too hot with some clouds but little wind. We had already decided to go along the main road to Skorping to try to get some information on cycle routes going in our direction. This was something of a failure because we were obviously going in an unpopular direction and therefore no route was available. We decided to continue on the main road until lunchtime. There was very little traffic and although it was quite hilly it was easy cycling. Being lulled into a false sense of security by the Tourist Information officer together with their useless map which we bought the management managed to miss seeing an attraction. We just cycled by the insignificant lane it was in and did not realise for about 3km that we had gone too far. Retracing has never been one of our strong points so on we went. It is apparently very well worth seeing, a bubbling spring of very blue water.

We found a very nice spot for lunch in a village square with a fine picnic table. As seems to have become normal here, as soon as we had made ourselves comfortable on came the rain. We moved to the nearby bus shelter but were not the only ones with that idea. A very mild mannered German shared it with us. He had also cycled the Danish part of the North Sea route. We discussed our experiences which were similar. We did feel a little sorry for him because while the Danes have been very nice to us they do not seem to like the Germans very much.

The rain didn't let up after lunch and unfortunately spoiled the views we should have had from the high and very rural places we went to in the afternoon. Our destination was the ferry crossing point of the Randers Fjord. It is not a major crossing point and the camp site looked rather run down and the village very silent. Because of the rain we wanted to be under a roof of some kind rather than the tent. As there was nothing in the village we settled for a hut at the campsite. It is all rather old and a bit run down but not at all unpleasant. It is much nicer watching the rain falling vertically from the sky from inside even an old hut than both of us trying to get comfortable inside our lightweight tent.

Day 37 Friday 21st June Udbyboj Vasehuse to the ferry at Grenaa

If all goes to plan today is the first day of the second half of this trip. We took the ferry across the Randers Fjord. The stoker, who knows these things, says it is the oldest wooden ferry in Denmark. The management just enjoyed the pud pud pud of the slow revving, presumably single cylinder engine of which he took a picture. None of the internal ferries in Denmark have had a price for the tandem. Some charge for two bikes and two people and some for one bike and two people. On this one the boy decided we were one bike which included a person. Not only was this the best solution so far but it led to a debate about which of us went free and why.

The route today was on very quiet country roads. As the only vehicles normally in this area come by ferry the potential for congestion is extremely limited. We also found nice quiet roads into Grenaa which is a large town by the standards of this trip, although the temperature of up to 27 degrees led to a degree of heat overload on the tandem's power units. We reported to the ferry terminal and confirmed our booking to go to Varberg at 23.55 tonight. We rested and explored the nearby yacht harbour before going into town for a meal and then boarded the ferry very slowly.

Day 38 Saturday 22nd June Grenaa by ferry to Varberg in Sweden to Kungsbacka

We have done it again. Arrived in a new country on a day which is, in effect, a holiday. The Swedes celebrate midsummer on 21st June. As we might have guessed from the way some of them behaved on the boat they take 22nd off to nurse their hangovers. Feeling a bit like Frank

McCourt in his memoir 'Tis as a young man when he first got off the boat from Ireland in New York, we went to explore Varberg. We managed to achieve two things out of the four we set out to do. We acquired some money from a hole in the wall and supplies from a supermarket. We were amused by the specially brewed low alcohol beer on sale and the total lack of wine, proper beer or spirits. I suppose they all just drink meths or its home brewed equivalent. We failed to get a detailed map of the area to supplement the one we had brought or details of accommodation.

After a picnic breakfast, no shortage of seats as all the pavement cafés were shut, we found the start of the route north down by the railway station. There was no mention of the North Sea route but we were clearly going the right way. Signing proved excellent and so was the surface. The route itself was good at the start going out of town and also for the last 20kms coming into Kungsbacka. The bit in the middle was a bit grotty on main roads. The scenery is again different and we are now in quite a hilly area. Geologically it was formed by the glaciers melting during the ice age resulting in terminal moraines. These improve the scenery but are a pain to cycle over. On the way we passed what archaeologists maintain is a huge stone age burial ground. There were many memorial stones some several metres high. We also rode along a ridge overlooking the huge Lygnern Lake. Here we made the mistake of talking to the lady in the tourist hut who gave us a map. Had the management's brain not already been overworked to the point where it was useless he would have chucked it in the bin where it belonged. Instead he attempted to use it to find a campsite. Presumably the media type who had produced it had not intended it to be used for this purpose. Why do these wallies continue all over Europe to ruin perfectly good surveys? Anyway we ended up here where no campsite exists in the non media real world. Feeling a bit desperate we found the addresses of rooming houses and hotels among the stuff we had brought with us. The first we tried had a room with use of a shared kitchen. Even though it is a bit seedy we were pleased to take it. We thought we were in competition for it with some Germans who turned up just after us and the management was getting quite pushy. As it turned out there were rooms for all of us and no three way international incident occurred. It had been a long day and the stoker was able to rest her legs all the better to pedal with tomorrow.

Day 39 Sunday 23rd June Kungsbacka to Kungälv

We heard the rain battering on our window and awoke to a stormy looking sky. Bad weather is particularly unwelcome today because we have to cross through the centre of Goteborg, a town which seems about the same size as Bristol. Much to our surprise the Tourist Office was open. We were not, however, surprised that they did not sell maps and that everywhere in town that might was shut. We got supplies for lunch and were stranded in the baker's by a hail storm. We put on our waterproofs and headed out of town. It was not long before the management, who had not taken the trouble to find the right route in the first place, had us hopelessly lost in a local wood. What's worse is that because he is always reluctant to retrace he would not do so until the path was too narrow to get the tandem through. The normally good natured stoker took a couple of hours and some grumbles before she returned to normal.

Once we got on the right route it was well signed and mainly on quiet roads and cycleways. We had not been able to get a proper route for the last 20km into Goteborg centre, the route we had been following ran out at the municipal border. In the event we need not have worried. A cycle route carried on for about 5km on what appeared to be an old railway track. Had it not been for the weather it would have been a great ride. The cycleway followed the coast passing many ports, inlets and islands. It occasionally cut off a headland to avoid a climb so the gradients were never steep. After this the centre of Goteborg was signed and we quickly reached the centre without needing to use a busy road. Once in the centre we followed the waterfront east, having been offered help by a friendly local who understood the problems of cycling through city

centres. This is a major port with some really large ships right in the town centre. Perhaps the most impressive was a fourmasted square rigged ship dressed overall with flags, presumably to celebrate midsummer. We then had to cross the harbour on a massive high bridge, picking up the way inland to gain height at an acceptable rate. The bridge carries trams in the middle and motor vehicles either side of the trams. On both sides there is a cycle track and then a pedestrian path. The centre section can also be lifted though this must only be required by the tallest ships. By the time we had climbed to the centre the wind was so strong that it was a job to hold the tandem on course and it looked a very long way down. The stoker mentioned that she was not happy.

Having got this far we were pleased to follow the excellent cycleway signs to Kungälv. There can't be many towns which sign cycle routes this well for 15km. We took on supplies at a well stocked petrol station shop and made it to the YH at Kungälv hoping to get a comfortable room. We had no luck as they were fully booked and in the absence of any other local accommodation we camped at the YH site. The warden would probably have been very successful in Germany. He spoke perfect American but was presumably a Swede. It is a bit early to judge but we are beginning to think that most Swedes are not pleasant helpful people by nature. So far the country only rates marginally above Southern Italy, the worst country we have so far visited. Perhaps the Danes are right about their neighbours. Anyway, we persuaded the warden to let us have a reasonable pitch not normally allowed for tents, as we wanted shelter from the wind, but we were not permitted to use the YH facilities despite being members. The first action gave him no enjoyment though I think the second did. We spent the evening exploring the area which is dominated by a very impressive castle and a noisy motorway junction.

Day 40 Monday 24th June Kungälv to Myggenas on the Island of Tjörn

After packing the tent we got on with chores and shopping and mending of the stoker's sock. When we left she had four very nice matching blue socks. She lost one at a laundrette and then there were three. Today one did the impossible and fell out of the pannier into the rear derailleur bringing us to a complete stop. It was a dirty job removing the remains which were not repairable.

We managed to get money and 100,000 scale maps for the area without difficulty. The ride today was excellent though a little short due to a lack of anywhere to stay further on. We left Kungälv without regret, after looking at the rather nice wooden church along a minor road. The road followed the Gota Älv, a major river/estuary, before turning inland where it climbed steeply into the forest. It began to feel quite remote although there were quite a few settlements. Much to our surprise the metalled road surface became like one of those used by Sustrans but this was not a cycle track. With only a short section of main road we arrived at Stenugsund and took the series of bridges to the island of Tjörn. The views from the bridges across the fjords on this sunny afternoon were spectacular. They reminded us of those on Shetland with tiny islands dotted in a blue sea and larger land masses adding perspective. It was also much warmer but not nearly as remote. The campsite is located almost under the bridge and would otherwise be in a very beautiful place. As it is it is not where we would choose to spend a holiday. It does however have some nice if rather expensive apartments. The stoker managed to negotiate a good reduction from the very attractive blond receptionist and we had a very comfortable stay.

Day 41 Tuesday 25th June Myggenas on the Island of Tjörn to Lysekil

Today was a spectacular ride in ideal cycling weather. That is not too hot, no rain and a mainly helpful wind. We cycled across at least seven islands and took three ferries. Views across the fjords were superb and those inland pleasantly rural. Unlike the Hebrides and parts of Scotland we never felt in an entirely remote place and indeed short parts of the ride were spoilt by being on busy roads, that is by Swedish not British standards. The odd thing about the area is that there

is very little sign of holiday visitors. We only passed one small camp site and hardly any indication of rooms to let. This has forced us to do much more planning than we normally bother with which is an absolute pain. The only alternative is wild camping which, though permitted here, is both uncomfortable and insecure. At lunch we stopped on a pleasant green beside a children's playground and the beach at Ellos. The few families there appeared to be local rather than visitors and the hardy kids were swimming in the fjord.

The ferries deserve a mention. The two car ferries we took were very modern, efficient and free. They were each controlled by one person, in one case a woman. They used the same principle as a chain ferry but instead of chains used huge wire hawsers. They are powered by electricity and almost entirely silent in operation. The final ferry was a passenger ferry from Fiskebackskil to Lysekil. To find it we had to wind our way through tiny streets too small for cars between rows of wooden houses and shops. Like much of today's ride it would be well worth another look but the management was determined to arrive in time for the four o'clock ferry. He has a strong belief that all ferries leave at four o'clock and on this occasion he was not far out at 10 past. After the 15 minute bumpy crossing of the strait we went into the tourist office near the quay and booked an apartment for two nights. Accommodation has to be really short for us to use this expensive method of finding it, but we did not want to spoil a nice day by spending ages wandering around looking for a needle in a haystack. In the event they were at least efficient and we had the kettle on before it started to rain.

Day 42 Wednesday 26th June Rest day at Lysekil

We paid way over our budget for this apartment but it suits our purpose fine. It is in a modern block mainly inhabited by locals. It is car free so it is fun to watch the kids playing and the locals going about their business. It is probably not the best neighbourhood in town but is near the centre and has good locks on the door. It also has an excellent private veranda for servicing the tandem. Apart from the normal jobs the management has been a bit worried about the steering. It may just be that he has forgotten how to control the thing at 60kph after nearly 2000km of flat lands. So he had the headset to bits for lubrication. In the process he noticed that both tyres were wearing badly between the treads. He had not noticed before because one would not expect wear here. We changed both for the new spares we carry and kept one of the old ones for serious emergencies. We estimate that both tyres have done more than 4000km which is not bad and the wear may be caused by the constant over inflation fashionable with most tandemists.

We also went shopping. The food shops here carry a much better range of vegetables than those in Denmark which is nice for us. The alcohol situation is however dire. The supermarkets keep what they call beer and cider by the big brand names. It is all specially brewed to be less than 3.5% proof. We would rather have tea. The only place to get real wine, beer or spirits is in the state run shop. Up until now we have not been able to find one which means we have been off the alcohol for five days which has to be a record. The stoker really needs her regular dose for medical reasons but has managed to compensate in a very small way by eating fish. We found a state run shop here and it is a bit like Argos in the UK. Prices are probably about 50% higher than one would expect to pay in a supermarket. State organisation seem to be the same the world over. The cashier even tried to correct the management's pronunciation, already correct, in France anyway, of Beaujolais. This has to be in restraint of trade and should be dealt with by the EC. It also seems to mean that this nation has a very limited number of cafés and bars. Most of the villages we pass through have nothing.

Day 43 Thursday 27th June Lysekil to Heestrand

The tandem felt good with its new tyres and lubricated steering system. Unfortunately the route today was not particularly good as much of it was on main roads without cycle paths or a hard

shoulder. To be fair to those who planned this section there do not seem to be many roads in this area. Cyclists have no alternative but to use the busier roads. It is still less busy than A roads in the UK and of course the drivers here are much more considerate and careful than their UK counterparts.

Just before lunch we came across some interesting bronze age rock carvings. As usual the management was reluctant to stop. But having stopped and got over his scepticism about their authenticity he was quite inspired by them. After lunch we came across an ancient church. Again the management did not want to stop but did so because the building had a porch. He feels that Christians who build porches for travellers should be encouraged despite their dogmatism. The building was small and interesting with a wooden painted ceiling and a model ship hanging in the choir. It had no tower as the bell tower was on the rocky cliff under which the church was built.

As the day goes on in this country one begins to worry about finding accommodation. We were therefore very pleased to find that our planned stop, a backpackers hostel, is very pleasant as is the warden. It is not up to the standard of some of the Danish hostels but we have a nice four bedded room to ourselves and it has a good kitchen and dining room. Even though it is fairly expensive by UK standards it is affordable. Having made an early start we had time to go for a walk in the archipelago. Just five minutes walk from the hostel we were beside the fjord. The scenery was again spectacular but not distant. The islands and inlets were all close by with several yacht harbours in tiny inlets. Yachts, most with one slab of reef in the main, were sailing close by the land at a cracking pace. Unlike many "yachtsmen" in the UK it was clear that these people knew how to handle boats under full sail without an engine in confined water. It was a pleasure to watch and the start of a pleasant if wine free evening in the hostel.

Day 44 Friday 28th June Heestrand to Stromstad

We were both very tired last night having come further than we should in bad weather. We awoke in our comfortable room to the sound of heavy rain falling on the roof. By the time we had breakfasted and packed it had stopped and the warden thought we might be lucky, maybe. As we left the hostel our fellow guests, attending a conference organised by their employer Volvo Bus, were settling down to work. Seeing them we did not regret stopping work and taking up travelling by bike. What would any responsible management want with all that team building rubbish or indeed with most of the other US management techniques? The tandem seems to work fine without them.

No spectacular views today but just very nice cycling on minor roads. We cycled along one U shaped glaciated valley often in pine woods, crossed into another and then along that one. We came across some more rock carvings, and there were far more of them than the ones we saw yesterday. This time it was admitted that they had been coloured in with paint to make them stand out, and then continued with the usual archaeologists' certainties which we take with a large pinch of salt.

We were lucky to find a lunch spot under cover. It was the service area of an ex petrol filling station. The rain came down heavily and persisted for the rest of the afternoon. We continued to Stromstad, though had there been any accommodation earlier we would have stopped. We try to cycle about four hours a day in deference to the stoker's left leg and the dubious advice of her consultant. Management errors which involve longer rides and, as on some earlier trips, continuing till late in the evening are therefore totally unacceptable. The warden of the hostel saw us all bedraggled and felt sorry for us, finding a room for us in the "full" hostel. It was very nice of her and perhaps, as we have now had two good hosts to counteract the unfriendliness of earlier contacts, we should rethink our view of the Swedes.

Day 45 Saturday 29th June Stromstad Sweden to Sarpsborg Norway

We made it into our fifth and final country which is a cause for celebration. We still have a long way to go to reach Bergen, but this time last year we didn't dare plan any trips at all so we are very happy to be here. Cycling today was neither easy nor on a good route. Furthermore, the management made a complete mess of the navigation at one stage which did not help.

After yesterday's rain the sun shone all day which was very nice. Getting out of Stromstad was slightly less unpleasant than cycling out of Weymouth on the Dorchester Road. The first 7km or so were therefore not pleasant. After that we were in the back country in pine woods which was nice. We passed a museum thing which said that the peasants here right up to 1945 just worked for their keep and were paid no wages. It is a good thing we had the Truck Act in the UK.

We then had the culture shock of going onto European Highway 6 for about 7km to cross the border. Norway is not in the EC so there was a customs post but no one appeared to be stopped and passports were not checked. We have good 100,000 maps for the rest of the journey, bought from the Norwegian Tourist Department on the internet before we came. We managed the first part without problem but the next part was spoiled by rat runners from Highway 6 who were trying to avoid a hold up. The next bit put us back on Highway 6 for about 10km because the management went the wrong way and very unpleasant, dangerous and possibly illegal it was too.

It took some time to find the hostel in Sarpsborg but it was well worth the trouble. All the facilities are very nice. Our room is pleasant and comfortable and cost about the same as an average B&B in the UK. We share the rather small kitchen dining room with some Swedish contract workers and learned more about their country than when we were there. They were a bit like Auf Wiedersehen Pet and made about £1500 a week as specialist brick layers in the paper making industry. Mind you they work with dangerous materials 12 hours a day seven days a week. They preferred the hostel to a hotel. They could cook for themselves which they liked, as we do, and found it is more friendly with more to do in the evening. Mind you, they complained at the cost of beer in Norway preferring the state shop prices in Sweden while we were just pleased that we can again buy it in the supermarket.

Day 46 Sunday 30th June Sarpsborg to Moss

We retraced our route back to where we left the North Sea Route to go to the hostel yesterday. We did not do this with any desire not to miss a bit but to avoid ending up on the European Highway again. In the route guide Sarpsborg is called "the town by the waterfall". It is actually a large industrial centre built on a huge river with a big waterfall controlled by equally huge sluice gates. It is much more interesting than other tourist attractions and we looked without success for our bricklayer friends from last night.

The route follows the east side of the river to Fredrikstad. For much of the way it is on paths right beside the water. Again it passes through industrial areas as well as pleasant countryside and made for an interesting and varied ride. We crossed the river by ferry and then cycled along the Fredrikstad quay which is not unlike a larger version of Weymouth Quay. From here we headed for the coast and a very nice lunch watching the ferry to Hanko Island and boats navigating the waters between the island and the mainland. After lunch we had an unscheduled visit to a very pleasant fjord near, as the crow flies that is, to where we should have been at Fjaera. On this occasion the stoker did not blame the management. Not only had the route not been signed but the map provided with it gave insufficient detail to avoid the mistake.

Having been considerably delayed by the steep climb back from the fjord we decided to make a straight run to Moss which has a hostel and several hotels. The alternative was a longish detour to a campsite that we were not sure of. As it turned out we made the right decision. The route

was mainly on good cycle paths and fairly undulating. Just before we arrived at the hostel we got a good wetting in a heavy shower which had been threatening on and off all day. Again we have come too far. The stoker is very tired but otherwise has no obvious signs of doing too much, thank goodness. We spent the evening in destination planning, a new and difficult discipline for the management. The objective is that for the next couple of days at least we try to avoid having to do more kms than planned just because there is nowhere to stay.

Day 47 Monday 1st July Moss to Sandefjord

Today was a sociable day. The route was good, following the shore of the Oslo Fjord and onto several islands. We left the hostel in its beautiful setting by the lake and zoomed downhill to catch the ferry across the fjord. This is the furthest north we will be for a couple of weeks and the nearest we get to Oslo. We looked for a normal car ferry and found a ship about half the size of a cross channel ferry with several lines of vehicles waiting to go on. Loading took only ten minutes and was done with a level of efficiency most ferry companies would do well to copy.

After about 30km winding along the shore we came to Husvik for Norway's shortest ferry. Here we met three Swiss cyclists whom we had seen on the ferry at Moss. We rang the bell to call the ferry over and got into conversation before helping each other on and off the small boat. We decided to eat our lunch in the sunshine at a table on the ferry jetty. Life is not fast here and we got into conversation with Anne, a local lady who was seeing her friend off on the ferry. She invited us back to her house for strawberries and cream so that we "see a Norwegian house". She had several daughters and grandchildren staying. We learned a lot about subjects as varied as the midnight sun and the Northern Lights and when the kids go to school. One of the daughters was visiting from her home in the far north. Anne and her husband have a 10 metre yacht moored beside the house and had just come back from a cruise to the Swedish archipelago. The boat is a very nice looking yacht with a glass fibre hull and well finished wooden decks and interior. With only 30cm of tidal movement here having the boat alongside staging in front of the house was no problem.

Further along the road we came to our next ferry and had an hour to wait. We enjoyed sitting in the sun on the jetty watching the world go by by boat. The many islands and remote pieces of shoreline here are dotted with summer houses. Many of them can only be reached by boat and people were arriving with all sorts of provisions and equipment and going off in all directions. The ferry, just big enough for one car, does a round bus like trip between two islands and the mainland. Our route was supposed to include a ride across one of the islands which is car free, rejoining the ferry to go to the mainland. Unfortunately we could not do this, nor could anyone else, because the ferry jetty at the second stop makes it very difficult to load bikes. The stoker then entered into a very long conversation with a lady from Oslo who has a summer house on the island. Like others on the boat she had brought with her a variety of things for the house. Alongside the jetty was a line of upturned wheel barrows and the exiting passengers loaded their belongings into these or onto bikes with trailers to take them home.

Back on the mainland we booked into a room on a campsite. Socialising had still not finished. While cooking we met a Dutch couple who were doing part of the North Sea route after doing final exams at Uni. Amusingly they seemed to have got lost at the same places as we did. We also met two men from Oslo who were doing as much of the route as possible in their one week holiday. We had been beginning to think that there was no one else on this route.

Day 48 Tuesday 2nd July Rest day at Sandefjord

Awoke to the sound of heavy rain and wind battering the building. Tomorrow is supposed to be a rest day. We made a number of phone calls and could not find anywhere nice to stay in the right location if we cycle on today. So we decided to stay put and have our day off early. By mid

morning the weather had improved and we went into town for touristy things and much needed supplies. We replaced one of our camping mats. Now the stoker has the absolute luxury of 1.4 inches between her and the ground for which she is very grateful. She would, however, prefer an interior sprung mattress.

This area was once a whaling centre so much of the town tourism centres around whaling. They don't mention the future of whaling. Hopefully there isn't one. Even so one can't help but admire the courage of the whalers before modern methods decimated the whale population. We also looked at Viking things including a ship.

The management had a go at the tandem and has become paranoid about the headset which he lubricated again. The stoker got on with washing clothes and resting in this beautiful place.

Day 49 Wednesday 3rd July Sandefjord to Helgeroa

The weather seemed to have improved after yesterday's wind and rain and we made a timely if not early start. The stoker noticed that the Dutch cyclists we had become friendly with were leaving before we had had breakfast. She was not impressed and put this down to youthful enthusiasm.

We went into Sandefjord passing the excavated burial mound. It seemed sad that after 1100 years all the things the Viking chief needed for the after life had been stolen but he had been put back beside the main road in a lead coffin. Rather than leave the poor sod destitute in the after life he could at least have been given a big RIB and high powered outboard. He could then have kept his hand in and do a bit of raping and pillaging on the other side.

It then started to rain hard and full waterproofs were needed until lunch time. The route through Larvik and Stavern was OK but not as exciting as some other days. It would have been nice if the planners had managed to put proper signs on some of the junctions. Like Sustrans they are good at putting up straight on signs when there is no alternative but not so good at putting a sign up when you need one. On the other hand, the signs through Stavern were good enough to lead us straight through the main street on market day. We did not look back to see how many café chairs we took out.

It was observed today on one or two of the very steep climbs that the stoker was making an exceptional contribution to the pedalling. Her output was noticeable because she is out of synchronisation with the management (only when it comes to tandem riding). This is because she has a free wheel type device on the timing chain. What this seems to indicate is that on a heavily laden touring tandem it would always be better to set the cranks so that one helps the other over the null. And the management at long last had to admit that the stoker does sometimes pedal.

Anyway, after that piece of technical overload, we are sitting in the sun outside the tent beside the sea. The hardy local kids are even swimming. We are looking forward to a nice dinner and a comfortable night with our new mattress.

Day 50 Thursday 4th July Helgeroa to Kragero

Another one of those great cycling days that one remembers when the adventure is over. The rain drummed on the tent during the night but we both slept well on our new mattresses. We had to set the alarm to be sure that we were in good time for the 9.30am ferry. The ferry was a rather elderly boat and mainly took cyclists this morning. The crossing to Langesund took an hour and we stopped off several times to pick up or drop off locals. Not only was the backdrop like those pictures you see in cruise brochures but the ferry also went between islands through channels that looked too small for it. We got into conversation with a husband and wife who live near Oslo.

They had their three year old son and eight month old baby in a cycle trailer and were on a holiday which would end when they reached Kristiansand. Soon after we left the boat we were overtaken by two young cyclists who were also passengers. For most of the day we were overtaken and re overtaken several times a couple doing the same route as us on mountain bikes.

The route went down to sea level and then back up into the hills many times, mainly on peaceful roads. We had one 4km stretch of off road through a forest with some short but very steep climbs. It also had some of the steepest descents we have ever done on the loaded tandem. We both had to work hard and the stoker also suffered great mental stress due to being in fear of death or serious injury. It is a great credit to St John Street Cycles, and particularly their wheel builder, that the tandem stood up to this kind of treatment. We doubt if it would have been possible without damage before Shimano brought out their excellent tandem hubs. It is also the reason that we would never tour without a drag brake whatever some people say.

We had a job to find somewhere for lunch with the required picnic table and were late stopping. The management can get very tetchy if he does not get each of his three meals a day on time. When we found a place it was worth waiting for. After a major climb during which we went round a mountain lake over 4km long we came to three picnic tables beside the lake. An example of none for ages and then they all come at once. We ate our lunch overlooking the lake with its steep pine clad sides reflected in the smooth water. The only sounds were those of the birds singing and the very few cars which passed by.

On arrival at Kragero we checked into our ensuite room at the hostel which we had prebooked. What a great day.

Day 51 Friday 5th July Kragero to Gjeving

The Norwegian friends near whom we cycled yesterday and a Danish couple were also at the hostel and we had a sociable evening. It was a lovely day and all six of us were heading for Risor which involved two ferries. Each couple made their own way between the ferries but we had plenty of time to chat while waiting. Both the crossings, the first of Kilsfjorden and the second of Sondeledfjorden, were again lovely. The cycling today, except for half an hour on a main road, was also in amongst pine woods and lakes with the occasional glimpse of the sea. At Risor we all said goodbye and wished each other luck. In theory it is unlikely that we will meet again but who knows on a trip like this.

At round about the limit of our endurance today there is a scarcity of accommodation. Or, as the stoker found out when she visited the tourist office, none. As voluntary wild camping has never been our thing we reduced our kms to get to a campsite for the night. When we arrived we found it occupied by a mass of kids who looked like refugees from Glastonbury. There was a rock concert on and what was worse, for them, it was tied into some god or other. Luckily we managed to find a very pleasant, if a little over budget, apartment in a waterside complex. We enjoyed the very long summer evening overlooking the activity on Lyngorffjorden. Boats of all kinds came and went between the islands right up to bedtime and probably all night. It does not get properly dark here although after a day's cycling we are not usually awake long enough to enjoy the gloaming.

Day 52 Saturday 6th July Gjeving to Roed near Arendal

Stoker woke up and complained that her mattress was too soft. The management coped. It was a lovely day and hardly anybody seemed up before we left. It felt like the kind of place that one could spend a couple of weeks but it would never work as we seem to have a very low boredom

threshold. As we left one or two people went into the cold water to swim but we had already decided that this was not good for cycling muscles.

We continued on through the pine woods and lakes to Tvedestrand. Here we tried to buy a new cycle computer to replace ours which has become erratic. We had no luck as the shop had sold its last one yesterday. On we went towards lunchtime and again we were lucky to find a very pleasant spot. We ate in the warm sunshine sitting on the side of a jetty overlooking a small inlet just big enough for a couple of yachts and some motor boats. For the first time in ages the management even managed to take a short nap before we got underway again.

We arrived in Arendal soon after 3pm only to find that almost all the shops shut on Saturday afternoon. This is a hard concept to come to terms with in a fairly large holiday town bustling with people. There was even a street market going on. There must be something seriously wrong with the economy here when traders can afford to shut like this. There was certainly something wrong with our tempers when, having cycled up a steep hill, we found the bike shop shut. We took on supplies, rather more than usual as it is Sunday tomorrow, and went on to the campsite. Unfortunately even though it is in a pleasant situation beside a lake it is not very nice. With such a limited amount of accommodation in this area we have little choice but to make the best of it.

Day 53 Sunday 7th July Roed to Hamre near Kristiansand

For several days now the stoker has been becoming more and more concerned. In conversation with some Danish cyclists she was told that an 8.5km section of the route was off road, very steep and sandy. Today is the day when we would have done this section had she not had the conversation. We had devised a plan to avoid it if necessary, involving country roads away from the coast. We decided to ask the tourist office about doing it on a loaded tandem which was too heavy to push and had narrowish tyres. This is not quite the case but got the answer that it would be difficult, verging on the impossible. So off we went into the mountains. Part of the route turned out to be about 15km on very steep tracks. The road started off nicely made and very quiet but soon deteriorated. At first we thought maybe we had gone from the frying pan into the fire but at least the gradient eased a little. On the good side it is the first time this trip that we have been into the mountains. It was especially nice here cycling in the forest and beside lakes. We had lunch in a mountain meadow and could have easily wild camped there had it been later in the day. Once back down into civilisation we had a very pleasant ride down the valley beside the river Tovdalselva. It was one of those rare occasions when the cyclist rides on the quiet roads on one side of the river and most of the motor traffic uses the other. As we arrived here it began to rain heavily so we took a campsite hut for the night. We had enjoyed today and done lots of kms. One wonders whether it would not have been better if the Danish cyclists had said nothing. In that way bad steps get dealt with and no one worries.

Day 54 Monday 8th July Hamre to Aros

We awoke to the sound of very heavy rain on the roof of our nice comfortable cabin. We had not even had a chance to explore the surroundings which seemed very pleasant. We did however have places to go and things to see. There are too many excuses available for not starting in the morning and if you use all of them you would never leave home. So off we went in the rain into the rather extensive and hilly suburbs of Kristiansand. So hilly to start with in fact that for the first time this trip we were reduced to walk a little way. Normally this is not possible because the bike and trailer are harder to push than to ride but we had no alternative for this short hill.

Kristiansand is much like most medium sized towns though the shops do not seem to have the range or quality of goods one would expect in the UK. In view of the cost of living here this came as something of a surprise. We had a couple of jobs to do. The first was to get details of places to stay from the Tourist Office which as usual was a time consuming and thankless task.

We then needed to get a new cycle computer. The town centre cycle store carried a very poor range of goods by our standards. It only kept two computers, both at more than twice the UK price. We settled for the cheaper one, a Cateye. It has so few facilities it would be a job to get anything so basic in the UK and it was a bargain just for us at only twenty quid. An economy like this has to be in trouble. If I lived here I would be getting my money out while the going is good.

We declined to have a pizza at more than ten pounds each and went out of town and were lucky to find a sheltered picnic spot. We then tackled in the rain one of the sections of the route which has been worrying the stoker ever since she had that unfortunate conversation with the Danes. Even though the weather was very bad and part of the route on the old post road was unmade it caused us no real difficulty. The whole of this part of the route was classified as a site of special interest. In good weather it would have been not only a very pleasant ride but also very interesting. At the summit for instance the road crosses a lake on a narrow causeway built in the late 1800's. Soon we were down at sea level again, booking into another very pleasant hut beside the beach. By the time we had got inside with all our very wet things it was also a very steamy hut. Those miseries in Holland, Germany and Denmark who said it was wet in Norway were certainly right today.

Day 55 Tuesday 9th July Rest day at Aros

When we got up very late it was still raining. The tandem still had to be serviced and washing and other chores done. The bike could really do with a major overhaul having now done some 2800kms on this trip and more than 15,000 since it was new but it will not get one yet. It has been management policy not to replace items till they break. A number of components will be in that category soon and just have to hang on another couple of weeks, fingers crossed.

The rain eventually stopped and the site was transformed. Just like that well known US Summercamp record Mother Father, guys were swimming, guys were sailing, etc etc. We were shopping, corresponding and route planning and as we write this we had to come into the cabin during a short thunder storm. However, evenings are very long here and the sun is out again and in a few minutes people will be back in the pool.

Day 56 Wednesday 10th July Aros to Homme near Vigeland

It was very close when we awoke and had been hot all night. It rained now and again and we decided on waterproofs from the start. We left the campsite hut reluctantly as it had been very comfortable. However, as usual we were pleased to be on the road and making good time with rested legs. The route was again very pleasant and on minor roads. We went beside the sea and inland to lakes and forests. We had lunch at Mandal and drew the Tourist Office rep's attention to the fact that we had not had a single route sign for 28km this morning. We think we have a point when it is claimed that the North Sea cycle route is the longest signed cycle route in the world. In the afternoon the signs reappeared which was fortunate because we were again on the old post road. Not only is this not surfaced and very steep but it also goes to some remote and beautiful places so it is a good idea not to get lost. The stoker is not happy on these steep off road sections. She is looking for support by email from other cyclists who feel it is outside her contract terms. Unfortunately for her she is unlikely to get this from her fellow stoker, Patrick, who usually helps when she has problems. It is well known that he enjoys a bit of off road especially if there is a suitable watering hole at the end of it.

We had to do a small diversion off the route to find a campsite as accommodation is rare in this area. Despite seeming to be well off the beaten track the site was full and we made special

representations as tired cyclists to get a place. Having done that we have been allocated a superb spot. We are within a metre of the water overlooking Sniksfjorden and the islands with pine clad mountains beyond. As we are only about 20cm above fjord level we hope that global warming will not take place tonight. In fact a strong onshore wind could be a bit of a worry.

Day 57 Thursday 11th July Homme to Farsund

We were awoken during the night by torrential rain on the tent. When it eventually died down a bit the sound of the wavelets breaking on the shore was equally noisy. The stoker was very scared that she might be swept away by the torrent but eventually we both went back to sleep. This was probably nearly as silly as the management putting the tent so near to the water in the first place, having ignored advice from the stoker. When we awoke at around 8am the front of the tent was just in the fjord and the guy rope now in the water. A rapid exit out of the back door and a quick breaking of camp took place. In the days of work the management's staff said he would survive the great flood. It looks as if they were almost right. Anyway it had the advantage of us rolling out in good time.

Today was billed in the route sheet as a hilly ride. Apart from the first few kms it was very hilly. We went down to at least four fjords and each time had severe climbs out. It was all very beautiful scenery and we thought well worth it. That is perhaps until the last climb of the day. We gained over 200 metres in height in under 4km with long stretches at 20%. Unusually for us we were climbing all the time in our bottom gear at around 20 inches. (We have never seen this measurement expressed in metric measurements.) Normally in serious mountain country the gradients are such that we climb steadily in a higher gear. On this occasion the road climbed through a gorge which looked like a steep version of Cheddar. Presumably the road engineers did not have enough room to gain height more slowly. Anyway the views were good when we had enough breath to admire them. On the descent and for the rest of the ride the management was having increasing difficulty controlling the tandem on the descents. Maximum safe speed seemed to be around 30kph, well below what was called for.

On arrival at tonight's campsite, no huts available, the headset was yet again dismantled. It is a non standard piece of kit by Stronglight using special bearings running against their own linings. One of the linings had broken into two pieces and has been causing the problem. This broken piece was removed and the whole lot put back together. In theory it should not work but it does not seem too bad so we will just have to try it tomorrow. To round things off we discovered that we had left the very nice strawberries we had bought to go with our supper at the supermarket checkout. We are both feeling a bit fed up at the moment. The stoker does not like the off road and its steep hills. The management is fed up with the bike breaking down. We should only have about ten cycling days to Bergen. It looks as if we will be planning routes where possible to avoid strain on the bike and the stoker.

Day 58 Friday 12th July Farsund to Svindland

With our new policy we retraced on the dirt road back to the 465, a "main" road. Not only was it very little used by motor traffic but the views were spectacular. It is no shorter than the approved route and it is hard to believe that it is not nicer. After the first climb we stopped at a picnic spot and looked back over three fjords and the latter part of yesterday's ride. Everything in the garden was not, however, rosy. On the first descent it became very clear that the management's makeshift repair to the steering had not worked. Not only was our safe maximum speed around 30kph but it was also very hard work. It was difficult to turn the handlebars and required concentration to keep the bike on the road. There was another downside to 40km of silent road beside and above fjords in the mountains in the sunshine. That is, where to get supplies. We found a large and lethal looking fish gutting knife in the road and took it into a

camp site as we could not carry it. The camp site kiosk was closed. We ended up in a very high place eating left overs and things in the bottom of the bag for lunch and very nice it was too.

It was obvious that we could not go on with the tandem in its current condition. A bike repair shop was listed at Kvinesdal and we decided to go there. We had visions of having to place orders and wait days in a hotel specially designed to reduce the children's inheritance significantly. As it turned out we could not have been more wrong. The bike shop also sold and repaired lawn mowers and motorcycles. When we arrived the owner was busy selling mowers. He did not have a replacement 1 1/8 headset. He did however have spare ball races for them which of course is all that utility cyclists need. When we explained that we needed the complete fitting he took the management upstairs to the loft. Here he had all his useful scrap bikes and lawn mowers and said help yourself. The management found a nice old fashioned mountain bike with all the bits he needed. While the shop owner got on with the job of selling lawn mowers the management was able to use his workshop. It is not a difficult job but needs a hammer and drift which even we don't carry and the vice was also useful. The bits taken off the tandem were just a tangled oily mess broken beyond recognition as bearings. It was hard to see how the bike had steered at all. When the repair was done the shop owner refused to accept any payment. Following photos and our warm thanks he wished us well as we went on our way. For future reference we noted that there is no point having high tech fittings for which spares are difficult to obtain on long distance touring bikes. It may be the best design in the world, which the Stronglight headset isn't, but if it can't be fixed in a village workshop with the same bits used on shopping bikes forget it.

By now we had had enough and thought we would book into the local hotel for the night and hang the cost. As luck would have it it was allegedly fully booked. Or alternatively it was entirely empty and they were not prepared to open it for only two customers. Whatever the reason we bought some supplies and resigned ourselves to another 20 hilly kms to the nearest accommodation, a campsite. As it turned out the management's minor navigation error paid off for once and reduced the ride to about 15km of not excessively hilly roads. He missed a turnoff from the busy European Highway 39 and was confronted by a series of three tunnels, the longest of which is 750 metres in length. We are not sure whether bikes are allowed in tunnels in Norway. There were no signs saying we couldn't go through so we put on our lights and went on. It has to be said that it was a scary experience though probably not very dangerous. The tunnels were lit but the dazzle and noise of road vehicles in a confined space is a bit off putting.

The management was able to use his experience of daily use of the old tram tunnel under the Aldwych in London. Unfortunately one can't use this anymore because it has been shut to bikes, without justification in the management's view. So without too much aggravation and very glad that we could once again steer properly we arrived at a very pleasant little camp site near to the entrance to the next tunnel. We even got a nice although very basic hut for a price which would hardly have made it worth putting up the tent.

Day 59 Saturday 13th July Svindland to Hauge

We made our way up out of the little campsite to what the route book describes as "an exhilarating five km stretch of abandoned road through magnificent unpopulated landscape". It was also our first climb of the day and for the first time in Norway the road seemed to have been built by an engineer who knew what s/he was doing. The gradient was more like those in the Alps than coming up from a beach in Cornwall. It has also been well constructed because, despite many years of almost no maintenance, the more spectacular bits had not fallen into the valley. Soon after this we were again directed off the main road to avoid a tunnel. This involved a hair raising (the stoker's) descent on the "appropriately surfaced" (by Sustrans?) cycle route. We avoided the next section when it disappeared down an equally dodgy looking descent and

stuck with the European Highway into Flekkefjord. This was not too bad because now that we could steer properly downhill our speed made it quick and safe. Here we joined main road 44 which we will follow off and on for the next two or three days. It was also the start of another three severe climbs on the usual extreme gradients around here. Obviously Norway had few good engineers and they were only employed on the important highways. Even the descents are a challenge to bike and riders and the drag brake has needed daily adjustment so that it keeps working. Having said that the scenery is still spectacular and different from yesterday. We are now into a much more obviously mountain region with less vegetation and more soaring cliffs and deep lakes. Unlike the Alps, having reached the summit we often went up and down a fair bit before the steep descent into the fjord. Having already done the highest climb on the route from sea level to 275 metres we reached Jossingfjorden with our last long climb ahead. This fjord had what the archaeologists purport to be stone age dwellings which we looked at, despite them being in a derelict dock area only populated by two non-discriminatory camping vans. The management reckons they only kept pigs in what we saw and built nice comfy cabins just like we would. We climbed out of the fjord to be met with a long unlit tunnel at altitude. There were no cycle route signs but rather than ride through we took a 1921 side tunnel to one side which had a bit more light from the odd gap in the sides. Unfortunately at the end of it we had to dismount and man(agement)handle the tandem down onto the road. We then managed to fall off trying to get started again on the very steep gradient. This would not be serious for most cyclists but the stoker is not allowed even smallish bumps. Fortunately she somehow ended up sitting on the panniers so she was none the worse though a bit oily from the bike which is disgustingly dirty.

Near the top we came across a notice board explaining how famous Jossingfjorden is though we had not heard of it before. In the early 1940s Churchill ordered the British Navy to rescue 155 captured merchant seamen kept prisoner in a German oil tanker. Apparently the Norwegians, then neutral, preferred to turn a blind eye to this. The navy were very successful. The Germans, rather miffed by this, are supposed to have used it as an excuse to occupy the Scandinavian countries, hence its fame. There was no memorial to the seven Germans killed in the action but only to three Kiwis. Even though the Norwegian and New Zealand flags were flying there was no indication of what the Kiwis did to merit this. The route book was surprisingly silent on both of these matters.

We were now on our last descent of the day to a campsite a couple of kms off the route. We were exhausted and got a very pleasant room in an old grain silo rather than put up the tent. If it had a lower ceiling with round doors and windows it would make an ideal Hobbit house. It is perfectly round with a diameter of about five metres. Even the bed has a rounded back to fit the walls. They do not however seem to have perfected curved cooking sink and fridge units. The standard unit was provided and served our purpose of cooking and eating well as usual. Though after the last couple of days our appetites are not dissimilar to those of Hobbits and there is no danger of putting on weight.

Day 60 Sunday 14th July Hauge to Brusand

We left our Hobbit house with regret. It would have been the ideal place for a day off but unfortunately two days too soon. There was no conflict between us on the route today. The book describes the off road by saying "you may need to wheel your bike". We stuck to main road 44 starting with a stiff climb out of Hauge which got us from sea level to about 200 metres. Not only was it well graded but the descent was also long and fast. There were very few vehicles on the road until after midday. The Norwegians must be either the laziest or cleverest people we have come across. They seem to be able to make a living by working hours we would consider part time. Most shops shut on Saturday afternoon and everything except petrol stations shuts on Sunday. Most people seem to get up late hence the quiet roads in the morning.

By lunch, albeit late, we had almost completed today's ride. It is always easy on the first day or so out of the mountains. Here it is slightly different because there was no major descent to flatter country. Rather the country just flattened out. We cycled through lovely countryside today but it could not match the beauty of the last few days.

As we were looking for the spread for our bread at lunchtime we realised that we had not taken our food out of the fridge at the Hobbit house. On normal days this would have been annoying but not the end of the world. But today is Norway on Sunday. 10 or 15km went by and there was no sign of a shop. We were beginning to think of what might be lurking in the bottom of the food bags. Then as luck would have it, less than 5km from the camp site we came across a surprisingly well stocked garage.

We again took a hut for the night which gave the management time to look at the tandem. It now steered fine but made the most appalling squeaking noise from the steering at low speeds. In great fear and trepidation he took it apart expecting bits of ball bearings and races to come out. Nothing of the kind, it all looked in fine condition. He cleaned it and put it all back together again with the bearings packed in Flora soft margarine. We are still worried about the bike and hope that the marge will cure the problem and there is not more serious damage which we can't find.

Day 61 Monday 15th July Brusand to Vigdel near Tjelta

Started late today but made good time on the fairly flat roads through agricultural land. It is very like parts of Denmark here with rolling hills and views of the sea. In view of the worn state of the bike and the stoker we avoided most of the rougher parts of the route. We could not however avoid the compulsion to cross the rickety pedestrian suspension bridge over the salmon river Haelva which involved some tracks. The bridge itself proved something of a challenge. The tracks to and from it were fine although we had to slide the tandem down to it with all three brakes fully on. Then we had to lift the tandem onto the start of the bridge which rocked and swayed with our weight. Once on the bridge the trailer wheel went down to its axle between the bridge decking planks. This was all great fun but told the lie to publicity photos which show someone actually cycling across. The management does not think he could manage that even on his full suspension mountain bike let alone a laden tourer.

A bit further along the road we met coming towards us another tandem complete with Bob trailer. We all stopped and took photographs of each other and admired the different technical bits on our opposite's bike. They were a Belgian couple in their thirties doing about twice our average daily kms and often wild camping as well. They had cycled from home up into Denmark and then got a ferry to Bergen. They were now on their way south into the mountains.

We had a late lunch beside a lake in the sunshine and were soon nearing our planned destination. With a rest day in prospect but no certainty of finding somewhere nice we needed to get supplies and loaded up at a convenient supermarket. One has to be optimistic that somewhere nice will turn up on a trip like this and it did. A few kms further on we came across a roadside sign advertising a hut. We followed the signs down a narrow lane which soon became a track leading to a farm house and the sea. On enquiring we were shown a pleasant hut with superb views over the skerries and the shipping channel into Stavanger. We spent the evening in the silence of the countryside beside the sea watching the sun set. We felt very lucky to be here.

Day 62 Tuesday 16th July Rest day at Vigdel near Tjelta

We discovered that the owners of our hut had just, an hour before we turned up, come back from a canal boat holiday in the UK. They gave the stoker a lift in with them to the supermarket so that she could get a few things we did not want to carry. This was very nice of them, although

she found the speed of travel by car somewhat hair raising. They also offered us a large freshly caught fish, which was declined causing mystification. Vegetarianism has not reached this part of the world.

The hut is ideal for us. It has a nice living room and cooking area with large windows looking out to sea. Even though it has a good indoor shower with hot water the dunny is out the back. This novel little shed is beautifully clad in pine with a fine seat, over what appears to be a smelly hole. We are not keen to look. I suppose the possibility of mains drainage or even a septic tank out here is not great and perhaps unnecessary. It is a lovely place to relax after a hard week and catch up on correspondence and jobs. There is not much which can be done to the tandem and we had time for some walks beside the sea.

Day 63 Wednesday 17th July Vigdel to the Island of Kvitsoy

By yesterday evening the management was already getting bored with the rural idyll beside the sea. We were able to listen to Radio Scotland and even Radio 4 when those few selfish men who have hijacked it on longwave for boring cricket got off the air. But even this was not sufficient to make us feel sad to be moving on. The first part of today we bypassed Stavanger to the west. It was still quite busy for a while but infinitely better than going through an urban area of that size. Most of the businesses we passed were associated with the oil industry. It was also pretty obvious that most of the housing, roads and other infrastructure were financed by that inefficient and unfeeling industry. We were glad to be getting further away from it as we went north on very minor roads. As usual the oil money had not run to building a properly surfaced cycle route and even what they had built was blocked with an impassable barrier. The management had a go at uprooting it with only partial success. It did him good to try and if he had been carrying children in a trailer he would be carrying a portable angle grinder under the seat. How much better the network would be if those ignorant people who specify barriers which serve no purpose spent the money on the routes themselves. But of course to find this out they would have to ride a bike.

We arrived at the ferry port via a very rough section of off road to watch the ferry leave the dock at 12.15. The next ferry to Skudeneshavn via Kvitsoy was not until 4.45pm but there was one half way to Kvitsoy Island. We intended to cycle round this small island and then get the later ferry to Skudeneshavn. However, near to the ferry dock was a very pleasant marina type development and we took a waterside apartment for the night. The island is very lovely and quiet and the rather large radio aerials are only prominent from the sea. It is rather like a populated version of a small Hebridean island but lacking the important ingredient of good whisky with a strong peaty flavour. We are allowed to dream in this wine and whisky desert.

Day 64 Thursday 18th July The Island of Kvitsoy to Haugesund

Getting a ferry at 8.10am is a bracing experience and served to wake us up very quickly. We speculated about who might be on it. In most countries it would be the workers. As work does not seem to start here that early and finishes at 4pm we can only assume it is mainly for those on holiday. We landed just before 9am and tried to get some fresh bread from the supermarket which had just managed to open. Only yesterday's was available.

For the first time this trip we felt cold as we headed north against a stiff breeze. Even the sunshine did not help much. It began to feel as though we were about as far north as the Shetlands and summer is very short here. The good thing about being up earlyish in this lazy country is that the roads are very quiet until mid morning. Once the traffic built up we took to the minor roads and some hills and pleasant scenery. Even though we had to climb it was pleasant to have the hills to shield us a little from the headwind.

We then had probably the most dangerous experience of this trip. We had to cross the high Kamsund Bridge from Karmoy to Haugesund. The bridge is very high, over a km long and carries heavy traffic. The road carriageway is narrow and on each side there is a walkway only about a metre wide. Between the walkway and a serious drop is a single rail at about waist height and between it and the deck a chain link fence which did not look very strong. The gradient up the bridge and the strength of the wind made it impossible to cycle on the narrow pavement. Pushing the bike was also difficult with a real risk of it and us being blown into the path of the heavy lorries only a few inches away. Needless to say we did the crossing as quickly as possible and were grateful to be off the bridge onto quiet roads, rejecting the suggestion of the cycling guide to admire the view from the middle. Short of retracing a day we had no alternative but to use this bridge and feel cross with the route planners. Furthermore, the strong winds could easily have been stronger but thank goodness it was not raining.

We were lucky to find a sheltered seat in a playground for lunch and then went to a couple of shipping agents in Haugesund. We would like to get a cabin on either a cruise line or cargo ship back to the South of England from Bergen. The people we talked to did not hold out much hope. We went onwards to the campsite and again took a hut with all facilities. Now that it is getting near to the end of the trip we feel that where it is available a little comfort is in order.

Day 65 Friday 19th July Haugesund to Royksund

It was weeks ago that we first realised that we could stay in huts on campsites. At first we were surprised that it was all done on trust and no checks were made. One is expected to leave the hut clean and tidy. While we certainly did not do this to German hausfrau standards we have always been reasonable. So we were slightly affronted last night when the campsite wanted a twenty pounds deposit. On leaving this morning a boy who looked about fifteen went to check. All was OK of course but we would not use that site in the very unlikely event that we are ever in Haugesund of the bad bridge again.

The first 10kms were on nasty urban cycle paths with barriers and main road. Actually the main road was not very busy, presumably because the locals were not up by 10am. After this it was a very pleasant cycling day. Yesterday's strong headwind had reduced to a moderate breeze and reduced further during the day. It was quite hot climbing in the afternoon. The route was on very quiet roads and we reached the ferry at Buavag for the crossing to the island of Bomlo in good time. Even better, we and the ferry arrived at the same time so we loaded and left. The hills got bigger on Bomlo and by the end of the day we were again in the mountains. We had lunch in a bus shelter because the northerly wind still had a bit of bite in it. Soon after we arrived we took delivery of the newspapers, about ten for the local village, from a delivery man in a van. They were wrapped in plastic and each paper printed with the name of the recipient. Then during lunch we were able to give them out to the two people who came to get them. The rest we left in the post box in the bus shelter provided for the purpose.

There is a shortage of accommodation in the Royksund area. We tried a hut advertised on the road which was not only unsuccessful but forced us to do a steep climb from sea level back up to the road. We eventually found a motel advertised in the route book. There were lots of people about in the hotel and pool but not only was reception closed but the front door was locked. Eventually we managed to track down a person who said they were fully booked. We didn't believe her and think it is just too much trouble to let a room for one night. It was however OK for us to camp in the grounds and use the facilities which we did.

Day 66 Saturday 20th July Royksund to Halhjem

Scandinavia was not going to let us go without a sting in its tail. So far we had not experienced the summer curse of the northern climes. That is midges. In our experience they are in a

different and higher category of unpleasantness to mosquitoes in the Med. We had pitched the tent in a very nice place 20 metres above the fjord. All was well until about 9pm when the wind stopped and they descended on us. Mozzies have a nasty bite but usually attack in small numbers. Midges just fill the air with their nasty biting selves. Our tent worked well at keeping them out but short of some kind of high tech air lock they got in every time we went in or out, call of nature etc. Not only that but the site had its evening entertainment on. The site is not unlike some run by NAF, the superbly named Norwegian equivalent of the Automobile Association. The standard of their mass entertainment certainly deserved that label and it was very noisy. It might be possible to sleep through NAF entertainment or midges but certainly not both and we had a very unpleasant night. The consequence was that we were all packed and ready to go much earlier than usual. Soon after leaving, with ointment rubbed into our itchy scars, we met coming the other way the young Dutch couple we had met in Sandefjord on 1st and 2nd of July. When we parted last time they were heading to Bergen via the central mountains and we via the coast. They had done this at least part way on the very rough Navvy Trail beside the railway and were now going back south along the coast. It was nice to be young and strong, but we like not having to go to work.

We went on over two modern and safe for bikes large suspension bridges completed in 2001. One wonders whether the area was more pleasant when travel between the islands was by ferry. The rest of the day became quieter as we got further from Leirvik. The route was very pleasant but we are now really just looking forward to getting there. The ride would have to be absolutely exceptional to merit special comment. We caught the three o'clock car ferry from Sandvikvåg to Halhjem. Having raced for the boat we again went straight on and she left. It was superb sitting on the outside upper deck in the afternoon sun for the 50 minute trip. Tonight we took no chance. Just off the ferry we saw a vacant hut and took possession. The midges have had enough of us for one trip.

Day 67 Sunday 21st July Halhjem to Bergen

Our hut was one of a pair in the grounds of a café. Later on in the evening a Dutch cycling couple, a bit older than us, turned up. Over a cup of tea after dinner we compared trips. They had been travelling about three weeks in Norway starting at Kristiansand. It was odd but they still seemed not to understand the first rule of cycle touring. This is particularly important in Norway on a Saturday evening. Keep at least one pannier full of food.

It was a funny feeling packing this morning for what would be the last cycling day of this trip. We waved the Dutch couple off and then left ourselves. The route was hilly and managed to keep us away from traffic until we were about 10km out of Bergen. It involved a couple of long climbs billed in the book as being hard. Maybe because it was the last day or perhaps we are now a bit fitter they seemed relatively easy. Coming into Bergen we followed the path of a disused railway line which was pleasant and properly surfaced. However, without warning it was blocked off so that some road scheme could be built. Rather like when the Rodwell Trail was blocked there was no advance warning nor diversions. We backtracked and muddled our way round the carbuncle and were soon making our way through the town centre to the ferry quay. Amazingly for Norway not only were there loads of people about but even some of the shops were open. There are bars, pavement cafés and a lively atmosphere unlike anything we have seen in Scandinavia. The stoker thinks most of those enjoying themselves are foreigners. We feel that the Norwegians may not have the capacity for this kind of activity which might involve them in making some kind of effort.

Rather than being overwhelmed at reaching the end of our journey we were immediately more concerned with getting home. Staying in this country longer than is absolutely necessary is not financially viable. We established that only one cruise ship is going to the UK in the next week. She is bound for Dover on Tuesday and we will find out tomorrow whether she will take us. We

also established where to get information about going home by air or ferry. It was not until we had had a shower and meal at our prebooked hotel that we realised we had done it and it is still sinking in.

Days 68 to 72 Monday 22nd to Friday 26th July Bergen to Weymouth

Having established that there is only the one cruise ship bound for the UK this week, due in tomorrow, we went to the travel agent specialising in cruises. The ship is Fred Olsen's Braemar calling at Invergordon and due to arrive in Dover on Friday. Booking was not straightforward. Apparently most people fly or take ferries. The ship had to be emailed and a price obtained. This all took time and Bergen is not a bad place for sight seeing if you like that kind of thing. By late afternoon before the agent (and most of the rest of Norway) closed for the day at 4pm everything was booked and paid for. We packed all the things not required for the journey in the trailer bag, leaving us with two panniers for the cabin. On Tuesday, after picking up documentation, we cycled to the ship. The crew coped very well with two unusual passengers on a tandem. The management took the tandem to bits putting it into three bags, after which it disappeared through a hole in the ship's side. We were soon in luxury in our "superior outside cabin". In ship class terms that is only one below the best. We can't take full advantage of our unaccustomed status due to the very old fashioned dress code on board. Still, we suppose it matches most of the passengers, most of whom are the just walking dead. We sailed through the night and arrived at Invergordon at lunchtime Wednesday. It was appropriate for the stoker to return to Scotland. She is half Scottish and it also added another country to our trip. We left Invergordon to the sounds of a pipe band, arriving in Dover on Friday morning. This was just in time to save our sanity which was temporarily preserved by the exercise machines, pool, Harry Potter film and the Tour on TV. The dolphins were also nice and had the advantage over us of being free.

The white cliffs welcomed us to England and to Dover. We picked up our hire car and loaded the taken apart tandem. Arriving in Weymouth by car is really no way to end an epic ride. At least as cyclists it preserved us for a day or two from the great British driver. We can now confirm that they are the worst, most dangerous, and inconsiderate drivers compared with those in the five countries where we cycled on this trip. They are also worse than in every other country in which we have ever cycled.

But it was still very nice to be back with all the comforts of home. That is until the next time.

Anne and Ken's
North Sea Route

Hook of Holland
to
Bergen

16 May to 26 July 2002

72 days

3344 kms

(2090 miles)

