

PRIZE-WINNING REPORT 2016

A cycle tour of Norway 20th July – 28th August

by Samuel Black
traveller 2015

It was on a beautiful sunny day in June 2015, during my sister's graduation ceremony in Aberdeen (I promise I clapped for her!), that I hatched a plan to combine my final year thesis work with a true Scandinavian adventure – a solo cycle tour of the west coast of Norway. I had spent the previous year on Svalbard studying Geology and Biology. As June passed by I carried out a lot of research (it became a bit of an obsession) into cycle touring, bought all the gear I needed on a shoe string budget and planned a rough route. I also developed a project outline for my final year thesis. The study involved some seaweed collection for which I was invited on a short cruise in and around central Svalbard.

After posting my bike to Tromsø in northern Norway, I headed up to Svalbard on the 21st of July and spent the first week there, collecting seaweed. Then it was time to start the real adventure – my cycle tour of Norway!

I arrived in Tromsø in glorious weather and hitch-hiked into the city. Tromsø is a great little place built on an island connected to the mainland by various bridges and tunnels. I grabbed some supplies and headed out to pick up my bike. After tracking it down to a postal depot south of the city, I walked 10 km across the bridge and located my bike. With no documentation of postage I had to convince a friendly Norwegian that it truly was my bike, describing every aspect of it in great detail. After some time he caved in and gave it to me – what a relief! I built up my bike outside of the shop in a car park, packed my panniers and set off at midnight under the midnight sun. As I crossed the city bridge to the north-west I looked ahead into the distance wondering what might be in store for me over the next five weeks. It was really happening, the trip I'd been planning and thinking about for so long was actually going ahead. Now fully loaded, my bike creaked as I rode the first 20 km. Would my bike survive the trip? Not including buses and trains I had around 2000 km of cycling between me and Stavanger in the south of Norway. As doubt crept into my mind I did the only thing I could do – kept on turning the pedals and set out into the wilderness.



My fully loaded bike - tent, sleeping equipment, stove, clothes, food, snorkelling gear including wetsuit, fishing rod and some seaweed samples.

Over the first four days I had great weather. Using an old 1980's road map a friend's mother had given me I made my way west and south along the coast cycling up mountains, through tunnels and on two ferries. It was truly magical! My legs and bike felt strong and I had all the gear I needed. I fished in the evenings after I made camp and ate cod and mashed potato for dinner. The roads were in great condition and very quiet and I truly felt out in the wild. After five days, two ferries, one hitch-hike and 500 km of cycling, I arrived in Lofoten.

Through a bit of luck and a bit of planning I met up with some close friends in Lofoten who I'd studied with in Svalbard earlier in the year, Matt (Austria) and Linn (Norway). I arrived pretty tired and hungry to a big bowl of pasta and a cup of coffee. They even let me sleep in-between them in the tent for warmth (what great friends I have). Matt played and sang an awful song on his most recent purchase (a ukulele) whilst I fell asleep. It was wonderful to meet up with them and we spent five days exploring Lofoten. We hiked, climbed and fished, moving further south every day when I would cycle as they hitch-hiked. All too soon it was over and I headed for the mainland on the ferry from Moskenes to Bodø. As Lofoten disappeared over the horizon I realised that I'd found my new favourite place in the world.



Lofoten - a place of magic and beauty. Pictured here with Matt and Linn on the highest peak on western Lofoten, around 1100m. An unforgettable experience.

One morning I woke up to the sad news that there had been a bus crash in the main tunnel out of Flam the previous evening resulting in a complete closure of the tunnel for the following 6 weeks. This 14 km tunnel was the only way out of Flam besides the now fully booked railway. With no money to spare and little energy to cycle the 350 km detour to bypass the tunnel I pleaded with a cruise ship to take me round the headland to where I could re-join the road. Luckily the captain agreed and after a free three-hour cruise (including coffee) I was back on the road and headed for Voss. My old map hadn't been doing me any favours up to this point, often surprising me with new roads and long tunnels. However, after rounding the headland of a fjord I was amazed to find a huge 150 m high suspension bridge in the place of a 40 minute ferry ride that I had anticipated. It was a great surprise and I sailed across the bridge with a big smile on my face.

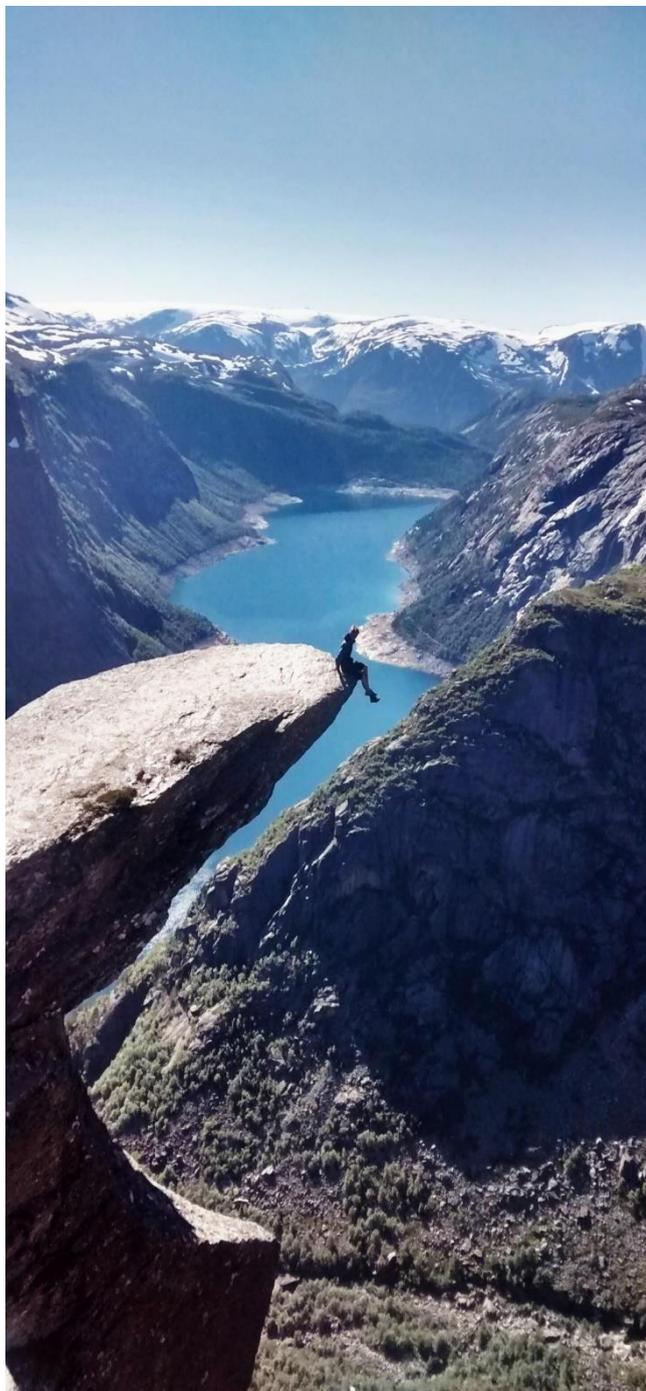
- - -

Eventually I reached Stavanger. A friend met me in the centre of town and picked me up. We went straight to the beach, ate ice cream and played Frisbee – this is the life! For the next three days I chilled out and recovered. It was incredible getting a shower every morning and sleeping in a double bed. We had planned some mountain hikes but high winds kept us at sea level. We did however do a lot of fishing and ate fresh mackerel every night.

The three calm days in Stavanger gave me time to reflect on my journey. I thought back to the early days of the trip where I was blissfully unaware of what I was about to undertake. I

thought back to the times spent cycling in the rain and wind, drenched in sweat and grit. I thought of the cold nights I'd spent in my wet sleeping bag and the horrible amounts of tinned mackerel and porridge that I'd consumed; and came to realise that I'd loved every second of it and wouldn't change any of it for the world. The trip made me realise that you can achieve anything that you set your mind to. Over the 5-6 weeks I'd come to learn so much and found a second home in Norway. I can't thank CoScan enough for the travel grant, as without the money I may not have been able to complete the trip. To anyone who has that adventure that they've always wanted to do or dreamed of, make it happen!

The final part of my journey involved boarding a ferry headed for Denmark with the plan to cycle to Copenhagen to meet a girl I'd met, funnily enough, on Svalbard. Long story short, things went well and I now live with her – but that's another story!



Sitting on the edge at Trolltunga - please don't show my mother this!



(original text shortened and published in CoScan Magazine 2016/1;
3 pictures were included, one of which was the front cover)