

Once more the North

Ellös, Orust Island, to Ardfern

Helmut Heine with Anette Nabholz

18 April 2016: We changed skis and ski boots for rain boots and foul weather sailing gear – figuratively speaking. We had a good skiing season at home in Flims, our cardiovascular system was in top shape again, our leg muscles back to what they should be and we were looking forward to a great sailing season in the North. Our life style alternating between sailing and skiing is very satisfying for us. We do not want to give up either one as long as we stay fit – and we stay fit because of our life style.

In 2013 Anette and I were in Turkey with our Hallberg Rassy (HR)48 *Tao 3* and we had a super birthday party together with friends and family. It was Helmut's 70th birthday! 70 – it's a bugger! How many more years left? We had met another sailing couple (RCC) just a few months earlier on a lovely older sailboat. He was in his early 80s and in excellent shape, so was his wife. They both still loved sailing, but really worried about their boat and the technical problems. They said they would give up sailing soon because they felt they could not cope with such problems any more and this feeling took the fun out of their sailing. Sad! We bought our HR48 in 2006. When would we buy a new boat to avoid such 'boat-aging' problems? After we had thought about this a little more we decided: Now or never! Let's enjoy a new boat and not worry about problems caused by boat-aging. It's enough to



Early morning start to Kristiansand

worry about our own age, and to sell our HR48 *Tao 3* and get a new boat would add at least another two years. This was the way we ended up taking delivery of a new HR55 *Tao 4* in 2015. One other aspect contributed to our decision: we had sailed to the Lofoten Islands with our HR48 and wintered in Ardfern. We cherished this northern sailing experience and really enjoyed it, and we wanted to do it again.

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Back to April 18, 2016, the day we arrived at the Martinssons Varvs in Svineviken, 3nm from Hallberg Rassy Varvs in Ellös on the Island of Orust, north of Gothenburg, Sweden. Last fall the complete rigging had been taken off and spreaders and shrouds disassembled and *Tao 4* was moved into a heated shed. During the winter much work was done on *Tao 4* by Hallberg Rassy and Martinssons, and we were very happy that nearly everything on our long list of additions, changes and warranty work was completed. Time flew by with getting the things stored that we had sent up from Switzerland by truck (about 250 kg), provisioning the



boat, meeting friends and making new acquaintances.

5 May: 0320 we left Ellös to sail to Kristiansand, Norway, a distance of 120nm. We ghosted out of the Hallberg Rassy harbour in the dark, manoeuvring carefully between the many unlit posts. By 0430 the sun was up and the air temperature increased slowly from 5°C to 7°C, very slowly a light SSW wind came up and by 0740 we stopped the engine. The SSW wind carried us at 7-8kts all the way to Kristiansand where we arrived at 1930.

We tied up close to the town centre at a fairly new floating dock. In Kristiansand we organized our data SIM at Sandens shopping centre, visited the Kilden Theatre/Opera House, with spectacular architecture inside and out, the Aquarama Bad which offered swimming pools and water slides and a little restaurant, the Christiansholm Fortress right next to the guest harbour and the little sand beach which was empty – not surprisingly with 10°C water temperature, 11° air temperature and lots of jellyfish.

7 May: Since we were told that Mandal would be even nicer than Kristiansand, we sailed in a strong easterly breeze under shortened sail to Mandal, which is much smaller than Kristiansand and is a very popular holiday spot. The New Culture House and the spectacular pedestrian

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bridge next to the guest harbour are impressive. We had wonderful sunny weather and enjoyed the Mandal Kirke (the largest wooden church in Norway) and the old town centre with all its white wooden houses. A walk up to Uranienborg, gave us a lovely bird's-eye view of the archipelago all the way to Ryvingen, Norway's southernmost lighthouse.

9 May: We sailed to the anchorage, Skarvoyavika. Again, we had sunshine and winds from the E with 17kts and 18°C. Skarvoyavika is a small, lovely anchorage with mud and good holding, open only to SSW winds. We stayed for two days, relaxed and went for an adventurous walk through scrub and bushes and up the rocks which gave us some great views. Sunshine and pure peace!

11 May: After a wonderful sail with SE winds, we reached in bright



Skarvoya anchorage

sunshine to Egersund. After taking the southern entry to the long fjord up to Egersund, we did not like the strong fish smell and the environment did not look inviting either. The bridge crossing the fjord at this point has a clearance of 22 metres, which is too low for us and we went all around Eigeroya to the northern entrance. We found a very nice anchorage north of Lauvsnesodden. From our anchorage we drove with our dinghy, powered by the silent Torqeedo electric outboard, to the 'Egersund Seilforening' right before the bridge and walked from there 2.5km to the town. We liked the food and the service at the Little China restaurant in the main pedestrian area of Egersund. Next day we moved *Tao 4* further west to the bay of Kvernavagen and took the dinghy to the north shore and went for a walk on the 8km long Hellwik – Egersund Trail, where only bicycles and walkers are allowed.

16 May: Our intention was to sail to Stavanger but we encountered engine problems and decided to turn around and sail to Sirevag. This

unplanned stop ended up as one of the highlights of our summer trip, although the harbour did look slightly dilapidated and desolate. We had met a couple of people from the Egersund Seilforening and one of those



Parade for Norwegian Constitution Day in Oгна

also similar. We spent the whole afternoon in a huge beer tent and learnt a lot about Norwegian history and culture thanks to our newly found friends.

Next day we went on a walk to the German underground fortification. It was built in 1942/44 by Russian prisoners of war. It is breathtaking for its dimensions and reminded us of very sad times. A walk along the beach and river of Sirevag with its beautiful sandy beaches cheered us up again.

18 May: The day brought lots of rain and drizzle, but also S5-6 winds and we left Sirevag for Skudeneshavn on the island of Karmøy, 44nm to the north. It was a bouncy ride with increasing wave heights and diminishing visibility. GPS is a wonderful aid to navigation. By 1600 we were safely tied to the dock at the very northern end of the bay right underneath some large buildings in the centre of the village. Fortunately we did not ground on the 1.6m shoal spot in the east corner of the dock. Since basically all the shops close by 1600, we had to wait until next morning to have our data card refilled at the Expert shop. They sell everything, from electric toothbrushes to tools, washing machines, to paint and SIM cards. Because Telia Norway did not accept foreign credit cards the store manager used his personal card and we paid him cash. We were impressed by this great service.

19 May: We left Skudeneshavn and sailed and motor-sailed on the west side of Karmøy to the northern tip of Ålfjorden where we anchored in the bay of Eidsvågen. The swinging room was very restricted because of mooring buoys and the sound of our anchor chain scraping over rocks did not let us sleep. So we raised the anchor and motored over to Leirvik where we arrived shortly before midnight.

20 May: At 0600 we left Leirvik heading to Bergen Seilforening, Hjeltestad. In 2008 we wintered in the Bergen Seilforening before we

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sailed to the Lofotens and we were looking forward to meeting the General Manager, Kjell-Ove Bruås, who helped us so much during our last stay. We arrived at noon and we realised that our friendship was still as alive as eight years ago. We met his family a little later, went sightseeing in Bergen and had an excellent dinner at the Nama restaurant, a Japanese sushi place. After some very entertaining and relaxing days in Bergen we decided to use a good weather forecast and sail to Balta Sound, Unst, Shetland. The very strong NE7 which had blown for days was supposed to decrease.

25 May: At 0745 we said good-bye to Kjell-Ove, motored the 12nm to the south end of the island of Sotra where we got out into the open waters of the North Sea. When we passed Marsten lighthouse the old sea was still very high and the NE wind was not enough to sail without the engine. Slowly the NE wind increased and by 1100 we could stop the motor. Our speed was about 8kts, the sun was shining and everything would have been really great if Anette had felt well. Mal de mer had grabbed her and she was in the main cabin, port bunk and was shivering. I put blankets over and a bucket next to her. She felt awful and kept shivering, she had never felt so bad. We had so much looked forward to our 200nm crossing to Balta Sound. Then, to make things worse, we got a strong wind warning. Our crossing ended up being very uncomfortable because of the superimposed waves of the old NE and new N7 wind direction and I had to stay awake for nearly 22 hours. I had to watch out for the oil rigs to the north and the ship traffic around us. The few times I went below to get some cookies or heat up some soup, I always tried to be back in the cockpit as quickly as possible to make sure we were safe. I would not be a single-



Tao 4 anchored in Balta Sound

hander on a long trip! The good side of our trip was that we made good speed, averaging 9 kts during 22 hours.

We came to Balta Sound nine years ago. What we saw now disappointed us slightly. The floating dock which was on the W side of the pier had been taken away. We had hoped to dock there again. Besides, the whole environment was depressingly dirty, with broken down cars, rusty and broken equipment, large and small old oil barrels lying around..! The bay of Balta Sound is a good place to arrive from Norway, with easy all weather access and good anchorages.

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Next morning we took the dinghy to visit Duncan and Jan Sandison, who we had met in 2007. It was wonderful to see that they are still in excellent shape with Duncan turning 90 and his wife not much younger. They are great entertainers, witty and interesting to talk to. Amazingly, he was sailing around our anchored boat all on his own in his traditional racing dinghy. And they still knew what Anette had cooked when we invited them onto *Tao 3* nine years ago.

28 May: We sailed in beautiful, calm weather, flat sea and S2 to the Bight of Bellister on Mainland, about 10nm north of Lerwick. The anchorage



Sunset in Lerwick shortly before midnight

is good, however, it is open to the north. The next day we motored to Lerwick, where the Harbour Master directed us to the Albert Dock.

With N7 in the forecast we got permission to move over to the pontoon on the south side of the breakwater in the basin where the lifeboat is docked, a much better place in such winds. A very helpful and polite lady customs officer came on board in the morning, helped us to fill in the necessary forms (Canadian Registry) and gave us lots of helpful information. We also met Leslie Irvine (RCC) who lives in Lerwick and he took us along to Whalsay where he had some business matters to attend to. This was a great way for us to get to know the island and meet some of his relatives and friends. From the Harbour Master's office we got the key to the Lerwick Boating Club, which has very good Internet connection and showers, laundromat and dryer. We used our folding bikes to cycle to the supermarket. Saturday 4 June we were in the middle of a fund-raising event for the lifeboat and had the opportunity to view their very high-tech boat: 1600 HP MTU engines, top speed 31 kts, 250nm full-speed radius of operation. The lifeboat can be rolled 360° and the MTU engines never stop.

5 June: Our friend Geoff arrived from eastern England. The wind was still blowing hard from the NE6-7, right onto our bow and the wind chill was -1°C. The following day we went on *Galathea*, a small motor vessel, on

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an interesting wildlife sightseeing tour. We stayed in the protected areas, outside the waves were too high.

7 June: The wind had eased and we left Lerwick to sail to Pierowall on Westray. We departed from Lerwick at 0900 so that we would pass Sumburgh Head at about 1200 to get the tide right. When we reached Sumburgh Head we stayed very close to shore, 200m from the underwater rocks, and had flat water. Further out it looked very rough. We had 3 kts with us. We bypassed Fair Isle. Nine years ago we had three nights in the little harbour with a very uncomfortable swell coming in and we did not want to have the same again. We had a long push from the current and arrived in Pierowall at 2100 having sailed 80nm. Tom, who is the harbour master (even though there are new titles now), welcomed us and helped us with the lines. We had met Tom in 2005 at the London Boat Show and he persuaded us then to come to Pierowall because there was a restaurant serving the best fish and chips in the world. This was the main reason why we had come to Pierowall in 2007 and we really had eaten the best fish and chips we ever had! Unfortunately, the restaurant was sold just a month before our arrival this time. We had some nice walks around the long beach and met Geordie Costie, a fisherman whose brother was one of the last whalers. Geordie also told us that a few years ago, before the seals were put under protection, the neighbouring island had about 340 animals. Since it is not permitted to hunt them any more, the population has increased to more than 3,000 and the fishermen consider them as a pest. No wonder! 3,000 seals eat a large amount of fish the fishermen would have liked to catch.



St. Magnus Cathedral

9 June: We sailed on to Stromness on Mainland. We went around the northern coast of Westray and reached Stromness in the early afternoon. We went into the guest harbour staying very close to the end of the breakwater since this is an area where quite a few sailboats had already run aground misjudging how far the shoal comes out to the breakwater of

the Ro-Ro terminal.

Next morning we went by bus and ferry to Lyness to visit the extremely interesting museum, went by ferry and bus back to Kirkwall, looked at the St. Magnus Cathedral which was wonderfully decorated with the 'Weeping Window'. We had an excellent dinner and great service at the Hotel Kirkwall. Afterwards we took a taxi to Tesco and back to Stromness, for a pre-negotiated and very reasonable price. We spent one more day in Stromness. In the pedestrian area Anette got her best, quickest (20 minutes) and cheapest haircut ever!

12 June: We left Stromness at 0450 to sail to Loch Eribol on mainland Scotland. We had SE4-5 and sailing was great until we reached the high hills of the Old Man of Hoy and Rora Head. Wild gusts from completely different directions came rushing down the hills and caused havoc for about half an hour. Obviously we had made a mistake staying so close to the hills. We arrived at noon and anchored on the south side of the peninsula on the east side of Loch Eribol. Geoff went to see friends who are crofters. And we read up on the interesting role Eribol played in the Second World War.

13 June: At 0745 we left the anchorage and sailed to Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 71nm away. We had planned to find a spot in the 'new' marina in the northernmost corner of the Stornoway bay. However, all the spots were occupied. There were a good number of "fixer-upper" boats in the marina. The Harbour Master directed us to one of the big tanker docks (Pier 2) and he was kind enough to organise a heavy, long fender board for us.

Next day Geoff – for whom it is not a problem to drive on the 'wrong' side of the road – drove us all the way up to the Butt of Lewis. The weather was beautiful and the landscape and the bird life spectacular. Port Ness was worth the visit, as was Gèarrannan Blackhouse Village with its houses up to 2,000 years old. They were renovated and can be rented to visitors.

We had a very good dinner at the Digby Chick restaurant. Next day we drove to South Harris, which has very impressive, huge, white beaches with turquoise water at Seilebost and Horgabost. In Tarbert we had a good lunch with very tasty smoothies at the quaint First Fruits Tea Room. On the way back we went to the well-kept St. Clement Church, built in 1520 and most likely the best kept medieval building in the Hebrides.

16 June: We filled up our diesel tanks and left in an E5 towards Loch Ewe, 35nm away in a south-easterly direction. The sailing was exhilarating: steep waves, great speed and now and again big, heavy rollers. The air temperature was only 11° but the autopilot was steering and we were sitting under our hardtop with a 'sissy-curtain' between us and the open cockpit, keeping cosily warm. We anchored at Aultbea close to the Aird Pt pier in 5m, excellent holding.

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Next day, shortly before we wanted to leave, we saw a HR 45 tacking up to our anchorage and were confused by the name *Moonlight of Argyll* and the RCC burgee on top. David and Lynn Wilkie (RCC)! We last saw them eight years ago in Ardfern. Now they are the proud owners of Jim Pitts' boat. It is somehow heart-warming to know that *Ceres* is in such good hands.

18 June: The next stop was Acair Seid Mhor on Rona, a really special place and very tricky to enter. There were several boats anchored or tied up to the rocks. We continued to Portree where we anchored in the north-east corner. We met Jay Devonshire (RCC) who recommended the Isles



Tao 4 underway to Canna

Inn for dinner. We were lucky to get a table. The atmosphere, as well as the food, were very nice.

19 June: The forecast predicted strong winds from southerly directions. We left Portree to sail to Loch Carron, Plockton. We tacked with one reef in the main and the staysail in a S5 and had a little race with *Stardust*, a Malö 37, with Jay and Gillian Devonshire (RCC). The beauty of our staysail is the barber-hauler, so that we can bring the tack of the sail much further in and as a consequence we have an excellent tacking angle and can maintain good speed. Hugh and Wendy Stewart (RCC) on *Mikara* also came to the anchorage. It was Hugh's birthday and we were all invited to *Mikara* for a lovely dinner to celebrate Hugh's birthday.

21 June: We headed for the Skye Bridge between the Isle of Skye and Eilean Ban and then to Kyle Akinn and Kyle Rhea. This is a really exciting route and careful timing is needed to make use of the strong currents. Unfortunately the weather was misty, rainy and cold and the wind was S5-7 right on our nose as soon as we came around Caillich Knoll and into



The anchorage in front of the Cafe Canna under a perfect rainbow

Kyle Rhea. Our speed through the narrows of Kyle Rhea was 13.5kts over the ground. The water around us seemed to boil. The helmsman had lots of work. We motored most of the way and found a very good anchorage west of the island of Ornsay.

22 June: The weather improved and we had a really nice sail in winds from SW3-4 to the island of Canna. We met Alastair and Dawn Platt on their HR54 *Alruda* and we all went for a lobster dinner to Cafe Canna. The couple who run the restaurant, Chris and Anna, do a super job. We stayed for another day and had a long walk in search of puffins, but they were out to sea catching fish to the disappointment of Anette!

24 June: We sailed to Tobermory, docked at the long, outside pontoon and went with friends for dinner to the really good Café Fish.

25 June: Loch Aline was our next anchorage and from there we sailed to Ardfern where we arrived on June 26. With the arrival in Ardfern we had reached our home port for the rest of the sailing season. From Ardfern we went several times with friends who came sailing with us on trips to Loch Aline, Canna, Rhum, Skye, Lochboisdale, Oban, Loch Spelve, and the Lowlandman's Bay where we participated in the RCC meet after the RCC gathering in Ardfern.

Looking back, our decision to sail in the North once more was perfect. We met old friends, made new ones and again we thoroughly enjoyed once more the welcoming and friendly personality of the people along our northern route. Quiet anchorages, spectacular landscapes, vibrant colours combined with tidal sailing, mostly cold and often wet weather, all again gave us a very memorable sailing experience.