

Camping through Europe in the early 70's

by Bonnie MacFarlane

Back in the early 70's, my first husband and I camped all over the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. We owned an old fashioned pup tent that was orange and had guide wires. It just fit the two of us and we slept on half-inch foam rubber mats and in sleeping bags. Getting dressed in the morning was tricky as we were both tall people.

We started out in Oslo, Norway where we camped the first night. European camping was very different: you pick a spot and camp as if you're putting down a blanket on a beach. Our first outing after sampling whale steak was to the Vigeland Park. Many of his figures were nude and one phallic symbol was nude upon nude.

In Bydoy, we saw the Kontiki which means "Sun God". I was fascinated that Thor Heyerdahl was able to sail this raft 5,000 miles to prove that the Incas from Peru could have made this journey to settle the Pacific Islands. We also saw the Viking ships.

Driving through the country side to Bergen, on the Western coast, we saw much hay drying on sticks outside farms and the picturesque Stave churches. Climbing the mountains, we saw snow and climbed up in it to have a snowball fight. There were many bluebell flowers, yellow shrubs, streams, and high water falls. We took a ferry across a couple of fiords with our car rental which lasted only 15-20 minutes.

The roads were very narrow and winding without much traffic. Many of the tunnels had large mirrors so we can tell if another car was coming. The sun went down at 11 P.M. and then, woke us at 5 A.M. We sampled: reindeer, goat cheese, and fresh baked bread and Jarlsberg cheese in every village. The countryside was very quiet, with no littering or slums, but cost of living was high. Gas was thrice what we paid in the U.S.

We spent a couple of nights in Bergen on the North Sea and ate lots of seafood. My husband bought a reindeer skin and we saw reindeer at some of the tourist stops.

We drove hard and fast back East and entered Sweden. Immediately, the roads were wider, not winding and the terrain reminded us of upstate New York: green rolling hills and forests. Farming and timber were the obvious industries, and floating timber was everywhere in the streams. We saw several Moose.

We arrived in Stockholm which was one of my favorite cities in Europe. We finally slept in beds in a dorm-like room which was very modern and had a kitchenette. First, we went to Skansen, an open air folk museum. We saw old wooden farm buildings with sod as a roof, folk dancing, and butter and cheese being made. At the zoo, there were: lynx, wild boar, moose, and polar bears.

Next day was my turn at shopping. I bought some sterling silverware in a very modern, expensive shop, and of course: the famous Dala horse painted in orange. In Gamla Stan, the old Stockholm, we walked along narrow cobblestone streets, with hand carved wooden doorways, and lanterns. I purchased a very colorful stained glass lantern.

There were many parks in Stockholm and one had chess pieces that were 3 feet high. The Museum of Modern Art was the highlight of my day as we saw works by Segal, Arp, Warhol, Klein, Miro, Munch, and Picasso. Later, we tried Aquavit, like vodka, but I didn't like it.

On to Copenhagen and the Little Mermaid, but that will be in my next entry. Oh! Once home, we purchased a lovely Scandinavian teakwood dining room table.