



Roel & Di's NORTHERN MIGRATION

A 5,000 km journey through 6 countries by bike in 2012



Tour Te Kiwi

The following pages are the contents of the blog we kept of our trip to Europe in 2012. The trip involved cycling from Amsterdam in The Netherlands to Narvik in Norway. We crossed northern Germany and rode up the west coast of Denmark before crossing by ferry to the south coast of Norway.

As we had not done any self supporting cycle touring before we had a 10 day trip from Amsterdam to Liege, in Belgium, to see the start of the Tour de France prior to embarking on the trip to Norway.

At the conclusion of the Norway trip we had two weeks left of the 3 month break so we headed off on an extra trip around North Holland.

Most of the entries have been written by Di with comments from Roel. We hope you enjoy reading about our "expedition".

Roel and Di Michels





- The Prologue
- The Main event cycle
- The Main event ferries
- The Main event trains
- The Warm Down



Hello everyone!

Yes, we are going on a 44,000km journey. This has been in the planning for quite some time and it is finally going to happen!

On the 19th of June we are flying off to Amsterdam (+/- 20,000km) to meet up with Roel's family for the first few days. Then we are off on bicycles via the west coast of Holland to Belgium, where we will watch the first couple of days of the Tour de France around Liege (+/- 400km there and back). We will be cycling back to Amsterdam via the south-east of the Netherlands, back to Amsterdam to prepare the supplies for the long journey up North (+/- 4,000km). That trip will take us again on our bicycles via the north of Holland and Germany, the west-coast of Denmark to a ferry across to Kristiansand in Norway.

In Norway we cycle towards Oslo, but before we reach Oslo we turn north-west towards some of the nicest cycling terrain in the country. We will follow the 'Rallarvegen Trail' and from there stay along the coast heading north, partly by bike with some sections on ferries to Bodo. From there we cross over to the Lofoten Islands, another part of Norway well known for the scenery and apparently ideal for cycling. After that it depends how much time is left over to head further north, possibly even to the Nordkaap, the northern most point in western Europe. We then fly back possibly from Hammerfest to Amsterdam.

Back in Holland we may visit some friends, do some sightseeing, maybe even some rowing, but generally we will take a rest before we fly back to New Zealand for the last 20,000km of the trip.

We invite you to come along on our tour via this blog. We will be carrying a laptop with us, so we will be able to receive and send emails, keep up with the Olympics, check on the news from Aotearoa, and we hope to keep up with your activities as well.

Let's go!

21-6-2012

We have arrived in Holland!



We left Auckland on the A380 and flew in this plane for 18 hours. It had its own set of novelty features, mainly the cameras situated on the tail, nose and belly allowing some interesting observations during taking off and landing. It was a really quiet jet and the service on it was pretty good. We had a short stopover in Sydney before getting back on board for a 14500 km section to Dubai. This seemed to take forever and allowed me the opportunity to watch more movies than I would normally see in a year! I'm hopeless at sleeping on plane flights but had enough power naps to keep me going. At Dubai we had a stop-over in a huge building. We went from gate 260 to gate 140 so that gives you an idea of the size. It was full of people who mostly appeared to be in varying states of zombiness, moving at different degrees of urgency or functionality. We wandered (that's all we were capable of) around taking a few pics of people and planes (as you do at an airport) and then settled down to wait for the flight from there to Amsterdam.

We were given Paihikara (maori for cycle) Kiwi from my workmates at Good Health and he has been travelling in his preferred place, nesting in Roel's helmet. He quite enjoys being in the photos and hopes to feature frequently. We have yet to make him aware that he is travelling to an area with no night-time which will most likely be rather disturbing for him!

We had a shorter 7 hour flight through to Schiphol and after collecting the bike (which appears to have survived ok – always nerve wracking to open the bag after flying!) we headed off to the train station to go to Piet





Heyn's house. Piet Heyn is Roel's brother. At this stage I thought that some rich Sheik may have placed a few extra gold bars into the panniers as everything felt a bit heavier as we carted one bike, four full panniers, a tent and two small backpacks across the terminal to the train station. We did a double run to find the right platform for the train but we got ourselves to Piet Heyn's house by mid afternoon. I wanted to get this blog updated as soon as possible so that those precious to us will know we have got here safely.

.PS. I have checked all the bags and there are no bonus gold bars....maybe I've just brought too much along!

22-6-2012

Cycling traffic in Amsterdam

Today it was time to get the bike back together and start turning the pedals! Everything was working well and it was off to catch the tram to Amstelveen to visit Roel's 89 year old mother and his brother Bert Jan. I know you are wondering why we're catching the tram.... at this stage we have only one bike! Roel's bike is in his mother's storage cupboard (he stored it there after purchasing it on his trip to Holland last year) so we decided to leave the two touring bikes there but return home on Roel's parents bikes which are the more "normal" bikes you see here. We had a wonderful day visiting his family and catching up with a lot of news over several cups of coffee and appletart.... lekker! We rode the two older cycles back to Amsterdam via the Amsteldijk which is Roel's old training ground from his rowing days.

I was riding his mothers bike which has an oval shaped seat which is a traditional womens style, although you don't see too many of them around these days. It was hilarious as I can only describe the feeling of being perched right on the edge of my seat to the point of feeling like any bump in the road would see me simply slide forward and go plonk on to the cranks.



The ride along the dyke brought us past the statue of Rembrandt, the renowned artist of yesteryear. One of his famous paintings is the Night Watch, a massive piece hanging in the Ryksmuseum. We also encountered our first windmills.

Our plan was to get some of the extra bits and pieces like compasses and gas from a store in town so we headed into the peak hour traffic of Amsterdam. This was interesting to say the least. Riding around in New Zealand you have the cars to contend with on roads with simple white lines indicating the middle and the edges. Here the road marking men get paid by the amount of white paint they can place on the cobbles and seal. There are lines for the cars, there are lines for the pedestrians, and then there are more lines for the bikes. There are solid lines and there are dotted lines, and they all come in various thicknesses. Roel seems to adjust to which lines he needs to follow quite easily but for me it just looked like a spiders web so my tactic was to try and stick to his wheel. Amongst all the confusion of lines there were hundreds of bikes being ridden at various speeds and coming and going at all angles. Don't forget that included in all this shemozzle is the fact that everything is also taking place on the wrong side of the road!

It was inevitable that at some point the pedals were going faster than the brain and we unintentionally ran a red bike light! This ended up with front wheel of my steed in a kind of compromised position with the front wheel of a motorised steed that was being ridden by a member of the local constabulary. Woops!! I smiled sweetly and apologised before pedaling off. There was some sort of communication from the officer which I couldn't quite understand exactly but I wasn't going to ask him to repeat it in English ...I got the message! Roel sheepishly muttered something about it being his fault as we continued on our way. We have had a bit of rain this evening but we are still at Piet Heyn's place so we are nice and dry.

23.06.2012

Old bikes and new computers

Today has been a quiet day as far as pedaling is concerned, but Roel and I have had a pretty energetic day all the same wandering around inner Amsterdam. We have had issues with our son Nigel's Toshiba laptop overheating (which is also the reason we replaced it last year!) so today we got our hands on a netbook and I have spent the afternoon setting this up so I have access to all the bits I need to keep contact with you all back home and to hopefully be able to navigate our way through the trip.

We are both tending to wake up quite early *[Roel: my brain also had a few problems last night being tired and jet-lagged, so I had a few struggles with sorting out the route and copying it to GPS format. At 2 am I was wide awake and solved it in no time. The result is in the 'Map of our planned tour' at the top of the blog page (roelanddi.wordpress.com). You can zoom in and click on the bicycles south of Amsterdam to see the details of the plan.]*

When we woke up early and arrived in Amsterdam at 8 am we had a bit of a wait for the markets to get organised and shops to open (most of them at 10 am). We walked around the canals for a while and Piet Heyn suggested we got the computer at a store just out of Amsterdam so we caught the subway train to there.



The weather has been quite mild since we have arrived here with patches of sunshine interspersed with light rain. Today has been cloudy and fairly windy.

Yesterday we returned the bikes to Roel's Mum. It is approximately 14km s to her place and we had gone to visit Piet Heyn and Liesbeth at their summer house which is on the Nieuwe Meer lake, close to the Bosbaan rowing course. It is a small single room batch with a jetty to which their boat is moored. It is a nice, quiet spot. We had lunch there and shortly after leaving we got rained on as we headed for Amstelveen to drop the bikes off. It didn't last long and gave me a chance to "un-perch" from my saddle. At some point the gears started to skip and jump so Roel swapped bikes so I could have a break from slip sliding! It was a quick swap to the touring bikes and then we were heading back into town for a final set up of the gear. Roel got a few spare parts for his bike on the way. Today we had a bit of a wrestling match with the pedals on Roel's bike as one was a bit reluctant to let go. Roel wanted to put on his clip-in eggbeaters from home so in desperation we took the bike to the local mechanic at Amstel Station across the way. He and Roel fought for quite some time to remove the offending part but it did come loose and now we are both up and riding with all the gear ready for setting off on Monday to the Tour de France!

[Roel: your feedback is welcome. My Mum receives the updates before everyone else, because her neighbour follows the blog and prints the posts out for her. She reckons, that we write too much and she knows all the details already anyway. Let us know if we bore you too!]

24.06.12

The day before the start of the Belgium circuit

Today has been wet. Too wet to go out on the bikes so we have had a lazy day finalising the routes for the entire trip and getting them into a format that will be easy to copy to the GPS unit. *[Roel: we are so ready to get going on the real trip, that we had planned to do a warm-up ride, but the rain was a good excuse to abandon that plan].*

Late morning we went into Amsterdam to an antique market. This was a large indoor market of really interesting assortments of all sort of bits and pieces. We wandered around lots of stalls with everything from stuffed animals from two centuries ago to plates and



cutlery, old children's toys to jewellery and war medals. There seemed to be a lot of old photos which made me wonder about why these personal portraits would be for sale. Having come from a family with strong interests in our family tree I had to wonder who these people were and how they came to be part of this collection of oddities.

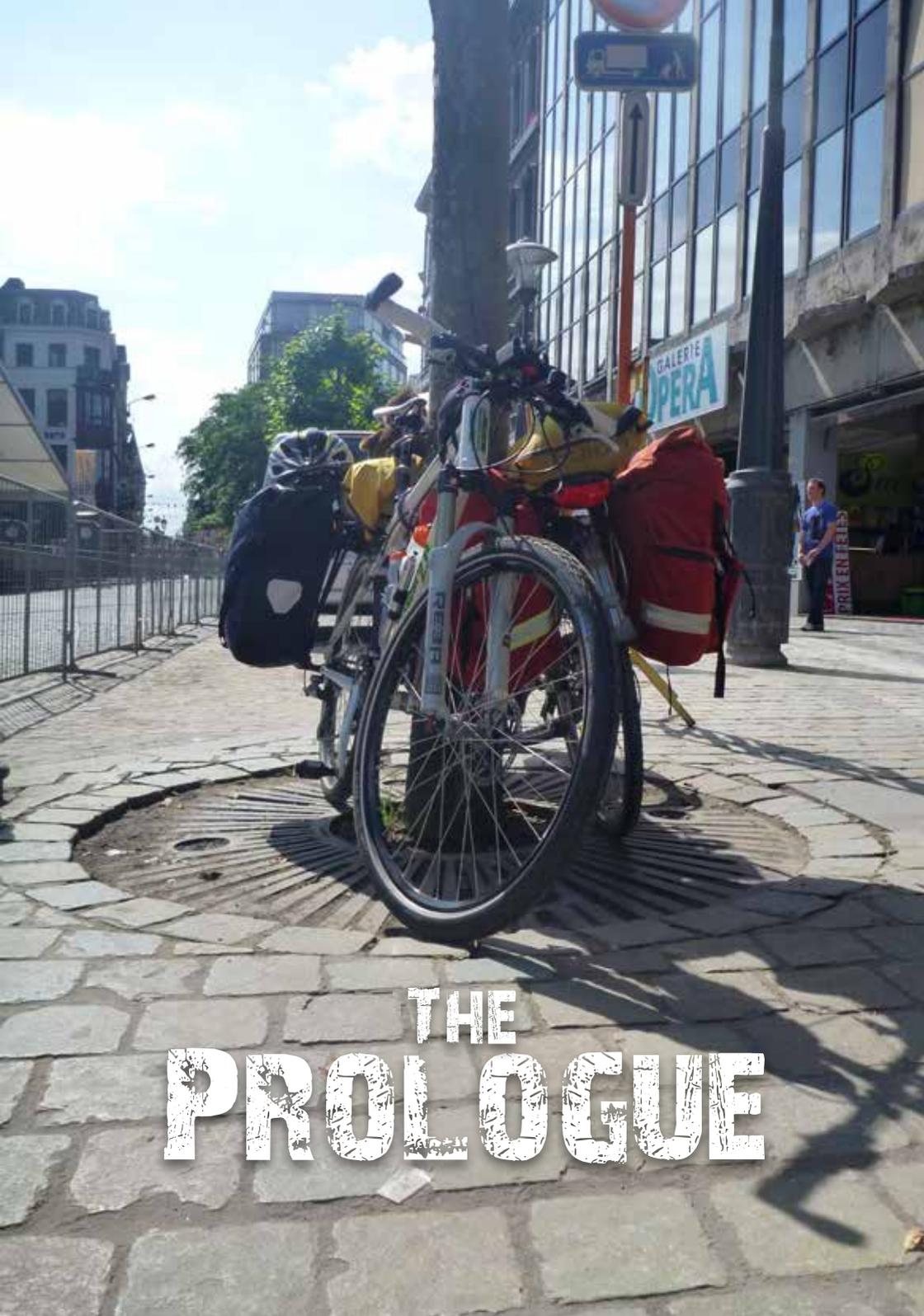
After we finished there we went out to visit BJ and Roel's mum. I stayed with BJ for the afternoon and watched the Grand Prix in Spain. I'm not really a petrol head (just a pedal bum!) but it was an interesting race won by Fernando Alonzo who just happens to be Spanish so you can imagine there was a lot of excitement.

Once this had finished we met up with the rest of the family and had a very nice dinner together at a 'Van der Valk' restaurant.

Now we are packing the bags for an early departure tomorrow morning on our first leg to Rockanje for the Tour de France start in Belgium. The weather forecast is for improving conditions so hopefully it won't be too wet.

[Roel: I spotted a poster for a brand of bikes at the bike shop where I helped (!?) the repair man to loosen a pedal, which I could not undo:

HAPPINESS IS BETWEEN YOUR LEGS . . . IT EVEN COMES WITH WARRANTY]



THE PROLOGUE

25.06.2012

Amsterdam to Rockanje

We are on our way to Belgium! We had everything packed and ready to leave at around 7 am from Amsterdam and after a couple of GPS issues we got going. Piet Heyn had come to see us off and get some nice pics of us heading out of the city. It has been very windy and mainly blowing straight at us! We were pretty pleased to get out of the city and into the countryside following the Amstel river most of the way. I took some pics of the Dutch sheep. They are really "round" - they kind of have a look of being in puffer jackets compared with the ones we have back home. Probably a safety device so they float if the dykes leak?

We stopped along the river at a country pub for a coffee at Ter Aar. It was a quaint little place with two friendly dogs. Along the way we came through a park that obviously had stock of some sort in it – probably cows by the number of poops on the path! During this portion we came over a cattle stop but there was a sign just before saying "Wild Rooster". It appears I would have to be on alert for a random ragging cockerel! It turns out that a "Wild Rooster" is actually Dutch for cattle stop!

By the time we got to Rotterdam we had become pretty hungry. We found our way through the middle of the city and stopped at a nice Broodje shop. We had a couple of buns each and a nice chat with the lady running it.

Rotterdam has significantly more modern architecture than Amsterdam as a result of the bombing it took during the war but we did find a couple of streets that seemed to still have a few of the older buildings. We followed the cycle routes that are very well marked through the city and found a route under the harbour via a tunnel specifically for bikes. When we turned up at the entrance to the tunnel the attendant allowed us to use the service lift to get the bikes down rather than to risk a problem on the escalator. We had about a 200 meter ride before popping up on the other side. We were then basically in the middle of the river delta and the container depots. It is huge. Container cranes are all around and the motorway system is full of trucks and trains moving containers to the rest of Europe. Adjacent to the motorway is the cycle track we have been on to get out the south side of Rotterdam. At the moment we are taking a break to update the blog at McDonald's before carrying on to Rockanje for the night.





26.06.2012

Riding the North Sea surge barriers

We stayed last night in a farm camping ground just out of Rockanje. It was good to get the tent up and to have an early night. The wind had been very strong and our legs were pretty bushed after 122km s! The local rooster had us rising quite early and we were on the road again at about 7 and heading off to ride around the large North Sea surge barriers. These were built after the devastating floods in the 1950's and protect Holland from more major floods. There are a series of these huge barriers that can be lifted and dropped as needed. The tides run very swiftly through them with waves big enough to surf on if you would be silly enough.

The good thing with the ride today was that the wind had dropped to virtually nothing and when we did get any it was also from behind and the skies were clear of any clouds. Very rarely do you see the windmills along this coast stationary but today they were all still and there was barely a ripple on the water.

We cycled through a couple of small towns on the way along the coast. Goedereede is a small village very much in the traditional style of old Holland. When we got there I think they were still sleeping as nothing was open but it was nice to ride through. The next stop

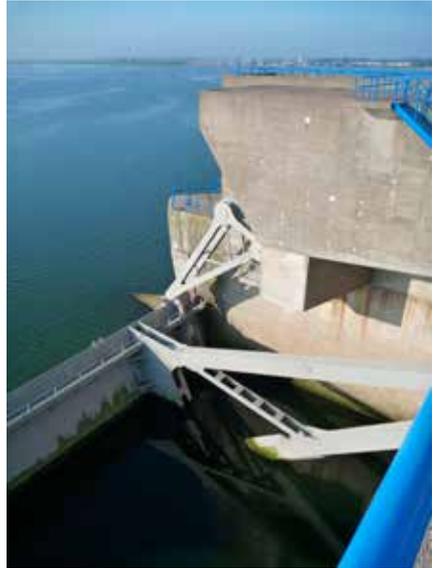
was more along the lines of needing a coffee fix! Most of these small villages have a church at their center and you usually see these from some distance away.

Roel and I had been going for a couple of hours when we rolled into Noordwelle in the hope we could get a coffee and appletart. This village too seemed to be devoid of people! No shops but at it's centre was this church with a very crooked tower which at some stage has some repair work done to it to prevent it leaning far and toppling over. At the base of it all around on the grass were heaps of clay torsos painted white laying in the grass. The men generally face down and the women were face up. What they represented is anyone's guess – there was no one around to ask and nothing we could find to explain. I'll have a search on the Internet when we get to a Wifi connection and report back.

On the outskirts of this village was a house built in 1679. It is incredible to think that there are people living in places that are that age. Just imagine the stories that those walls could tell!

We rode the dykes around the north side of Schouwen-Duiveland. At some stage about 11km s out of Goes we could see in the distance a fellow on roller blades going like the clappers behind a woman on a bike (also going like the clappers!). It took a fair effort to catch up with them but when we did we had an interesting chat to the dude. It appears he is into long distance ice skating and competes in age group competitions all over the place. He completed the last Elfstedentocht in 1997 (200km s). We rode along with him at an average of about 24kph which was pretty hard work for Roel and I with our loaded bikes and bid farewell at Goes. It turns out he is 67 years old and his fast 'vrouw' (wife) is 66 - There is no sitting on the couch for those two!

Tonight we are camping in Wemeldinge a quaint fishing village. We are both feeling the legs after





another 100km s on the flat. It's funny because you would think riding the flat would be easy but there is no let up from turning the pedals and no opportunity to coast down any hills.

27.06.2012

Circuits and dog legs in Belgium

Today was going to be another 80 or so kms but we did a couple of circuits, pirouettes and an out and back! The distance on the route was only 45 kms as you see it on the route from start to finish but by the time we had done all these extra bits we have most likely clocked up the 80km s.



We started off from Wemeldinge at about 8am. Both of us are suffering from pretty nasty head colds so we had a slower start today. We started off with a stop on the bridge crossing just after taking off on the way to Yerseke and down the north side of the narrow arm of the peninsula. We stopped at Woensdrecht for a coffee and sticky cinnamon roll (which had somehow got squashed in Roel's pannier bag!) next to a Canadian tank which is now a monument from the war. Woensdrecht is quite elevated compared to the rest of this area and the Germans had occupied it during the war. The Canadian forces arrived to liberate the town and faced a barrage of resistance. I guess the height made it very difficult to carry out the mission but they completed it with the shocking loss of 300 men. It is one of the big battles in this area and the locals have gone to a lot of effort to make sure the Canadian forces are well respected with several memorials. This tank was used in the liberation.



We continued south down to Putte which is on the Holland/Belgium border.

Up to now we have been navigating with a detailed cycle track map of Holland and the GPS but today we had the GPS off as we hadn't reprogrammed the route from our detours



yesterday. We were ok until we crossed the border at about 1 pm and then it sort of went pear shaped (the navigation that is). We wanted to go around the outside of Antwerp and headed for Kapellen, down to Schoten, across east to Schilde and east to Herentals. We arrived in Schoten and rode around sure that we were heading in the right direction. We went through a round-about with 4 workmen tidying up the tall monument and gardens who yelled something at us as we shot through (not sure what though). After approximately 30-40 mins we popped out at the same placewoops! The workmen had gone by then too. We got a set of directions from a lady who suggested to head back the way we had come and turn left at some point along the road. Off we went but nothing seemed to make sense direction wise. We stopped another chappie who gave us another set of directions, but they didn't work out and in desperation we came across a sign pointing to Schilde down a side road. Ok, I said to Roel we can't go wrong if we follow the signs which took us back to Schoten city centre for the third time but from a different direction. Something just wasn't right. At 6pm we went and bought the bits for dinner and tomorrow's breakfast and were hell bent on at least getting out of Schoten.

It's a very nice place but we had pretty much seen it all by this time. We trundled past an information center and asked about camping in the area and found the nearest place



was just out of Brecht. So we had another back track across Schoten but by this stage we had a specific address which we could use after feeding it into the GPS. We arrived at our destination at 7pm. It has been a tiring day but our legs are not completely knackered and we are planning a route west towards Leopoldsburg and then the day after south to Borgloon.

28.06.2012

Cow houses and off road riding in Belgium

Today has been a short one – 55km – largely due to the fact we navigated a lot more cleanly and didn't have any major back tracks. It was back to using the GPS! We did run off the map on the GPS though, which was confusing - we hadn't loaded up enough area. We have made some changes to the route which has taken us around smaller towns but with a bit of tiki touring we have travelled pretty much east of where we were last night and are staying over on the outskirts of Dessel.

We went from the camping to Malle and stopped for a coffee in Ost Malle. This stop seemed to be in a bit of an arty area as there were signs to galleries at the spot where we stopped. Since arriving in Belgium it has been really obvious that the people here like to have their houses really large and on separate sections similar to New Zealand. Some of them can be three levels, many with thatched roofs and nearly all made from bricks. Some have interesting round parts like castles and wobbly roof lines.

Now that we have got out of the Antwerp area the towns are more spread out and the roads between them are long and straight. We can be travelling along for 7 - 8 kms without a change in direction which feels really strange when you think just how long this is. All that is visible is a convergence of a tree lined roadway!

Shortly after leaving Lille we came across one of the farms where the main farm house is close to the animal barn where the cows are kept indoors. The doors to it were open and we spied a herd inside so we went to have a look and take some pics. There was a mixture of adult cows and calves in pens and happily munching on some feed. It was quite staggering that there was very little smell which one would associate with confined cows and they were remarkably clean. The farmer came out – probably curious that there were two bikes parked outside his shed. We had a short chat to him and explained that back home the cattle are outdoors all year round and that this type of farming is quite different for us.

We had lunch at Kasterlee which had a rather nice sculpture of a man and a dog in the center of the town. Apparently this is a local sculptors interpretation of the middle of town..... Going out of Kasterlee we decided to take the mountain-bike route which started as a rather nice bush track well used by the locals. We branched off on a side track which became rather muddy and probably a bit technical for our slick tyres and loaded steeds... Another small back track and then we carried on along the previous trail.

This came to an abrupt end due to a new road being constructed! We could see a crossing



point to our left so took a detour (not sign posted) through the forest tracks which brought us out at someone's back yard. There was a large gate which obviously led to the road so we scuttled through and got on our way on the road this time. It was nice on this patch of trails in the forest and would have made a great place for some MTBO (mountain-bike orienteering) competitions. By this time of the day it was also very hot and the shade was nice!

We travelled another 8km s of straight road to Retie and headed for a camping ground just on the east side. On the way we were stopped by what looked like a very official character on a small motorbike. My first thoughts were that this dude was a member of the local police but there was nothing written on the bike (or him for that matter) that would indicate as much. He went into great detail that he wanted us to do something but for the life of me I couldn't work it out. Next minute a heap of school kids came along on bikes and it was obvious he was warning us to take care as we were sharing the same cycle-way which was a two way affair.

We came to a camping shortly after and thought this could be quite good to stop at. It became apparent that Belgium stops for about an hour for lunch and we weren't able to check in so with very little discussion we shot into the attached tavern for a cold beer.

Whilst in there we decided to carry on to the next one that had a swimming hole and was about 5 kms further down the road. We did make a turn to early for this one and on the way back out followed along behind a horse drawn wagon with a family. The horse had no fear of the bikes and was trotting along happily while I took some pics. Belgium and Holland have a lot of the heavy horse breeds on farms out in the country areas and I guess they are used as an alternative transport, although this is the first time we have seen one working.

Got to the camping and the first thing we did was get into the lake..... nice! It is very hot here. Almost better to ride early in the morning and late afternoon and do what the locals do and have a mid day break.

Tomorrow we have a night in a real bed with a couple who are members of the 'friends of the bike' network. They make a bed available for travelling cyclists for 19 euros per night.

29.06.2012

Two days worth today!

We have arrived at our home stay in Borgloon. We had our first spots of light rain with a couple of showers on the way down. It was overcast to start with but the tent was dry when we packed up which is always good!



The houses here in Belgium are quite large as I pointed out in the last post but there is also some funny Belgian thing about how many windows you can have on a certain side of your house (or so Roel says – they pay extra taxes if they have too many). We have passed a few of those, which have a front door and no windows on one side. These also usually have fairly untidy gardens. Most of the houses in this Flanders region have beautifully formed formal gardens which are predominately box bush hedging with added features of flowers and sculptures. Talking about flowers, there are lots of clusters of what appears

to be the red poppies we associate with ANZAC day. They grow as wild flowers all over the place.

We stopped to look at a 1000 year old oak tree. It was very impressive. It has had quite a bit of care but from one side of it appears to be deteriorating as there is a large portion of the trunk in a bad way but it is still very green and leafy so I guessed there may be a few more years in it yet!

During a rain shower we sheltered in a railway station that had everything you need..... a clock, a timetable and a seat. Other than that the refurbished room at the station had nothing – but it was dry!

We finally went up a hill!!!! 116 meters above sea level is where Borgloon is situated so it was nice to finally get to see an elevated view.

Tomorrow we head to Liege to watch the start of the Tour de France. They have the 6 km prologue around the inner city.

30.06.2012
Tour de France starts today!

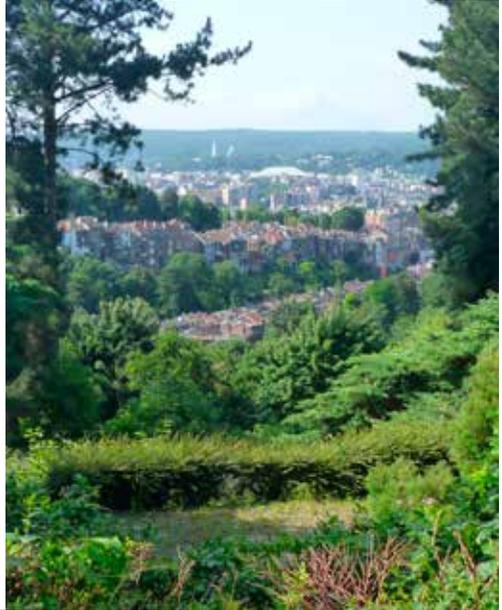
We had a wonderful breakfast with our 'Vrienden van de Fiets' hosts Jos and Cecile. They fed us up on homemade bread, fruit from their garden, and fresh eggs. Then we were on our way to Liege at about 8 am. We had a few more hills today and a side/head wind down to Liege. It is a pretty city that drops down to a river and canal system. The streets are all cobble stoned in the inner part and there are heaps of beautiful old buildings and sculptures around the place.



The entire inner city shopping precinct was decked out for the race similar to the Viaduct area during the Rugby World Cup at home. There were thousands of people flooding into the place to watch the prologue and we just cycled on to the course and head off to check it out.

There were quite a few laughs from spectators as we trundled around with all our gear on the bikes but the police decided that it was probably best we didn't ride all the way round and shepherded us off before we completed the circuit. *[Roel: everyone laughs at the camera on my head, but I have the last laugh]*. We had identified our spot during this process and made our way to a nice cafe "track side" where we tied the steeds up to a tree. We are quite particular about the security of the gear and eventually ended up at a table next to them for the day, which was great.

The sponsors caravans came through before the racing started and this consisted of a bundle of "funny cars" throwing samples out for people to grab. Obviously there are people who follow this race year after year because it was like a kids lolly scramble with adult participation! A family next to us was incredibly good at grabbing their share (and every one elses) and stashing it in their bag under the table.





The racing started at 2 pm with each rider going off at 1 minute intervals. It was a technical course with a few tight turns and all on cobbles. We didn't see any but an Aussie said tonight that there had been a couple of crashes. Greg Henderson is our only rider this year and he rode well to finish inside the top 20.

After the racing ended we made our way out of town to the camping and have settled in the tent for the night in a lovely spot at Esneux where we will stay tomorrow night as well. The first leg of the Tour de France is a loop around here so we hope to ride across country to see the riders come through twice.

31.06.2012

Tour de France second day racing

Today was the first full stage of the Tour de France with Cancellara in yellow (the lead) after the prologue yesterday. We decided to ride west of here to Trooz and took the shortest route which just happened to have a sizeable rise in it. We climbed for a good 15-20 minutes but without all the gear we didn't have too many issues with it (we are staying at this camping tonight so we left most of the stuff in the tent for the day). This area is known as the Ardennes and it has some beautiful small towns and villages dotted around and about. We rode to the western side of Trooz and settled ourselves on a wall beside a graveyard. There we could get a good view as the riders went past and from a slightly elevated platform. There is a huge following of this race and we were again part of a crowd of a few hundred. The riders finally appeared after the caravan of sponsors had passed through and they were followed by 30-40 official cars and press vehicles. The police were coming through at regular intervals on motorbikes and finally the peloton turned up with a 6 man break-away group in front by about 45 seconds.





The people around us here were quite amazed we were from New Zealand (we had our MTBO Challenge shirts on) and we chatted to them about our plans to travel north whilst Roel got the billy out to make a cup of tea with our cheese rolls for lunch. They also gave us a couple of chocolate mousse desert things, which was much appreciated.

We left the township of Trooz and returned to the camping area via Chaufontaine where there were still cafes crowded with people even though the race had moved on. It was considerably flatter going this way as we followed the river back towards Liege before turning off towards Tilff and Mery.



We had a brief stop at the camping ground and chatted with some English people before heading off with them to Esneux and finding the race again at Plainveaux. They were pretty certain they knew how to get there and we followed them down to Esneux which was absolutely pumping with activity and had a big screen that people were glued to. We rode into Esneux and made a switch back which took us on to the road to where the race would pass at Plainveaux. We got ourselves in a spot with heaps more enthusiasts and awaited the race. The breakaway was still out in front (but only just) with about 20 kms to go. After it passed through we went back down to Esneux and watched the finish on the big screen. They finished on the hill we rode down yesterday which was pretty nasty at the end of the 190 odd kms they rode today. Cancellara was second but I think he holds the yellow jersey for tomorrow's racing. We have returned to the camping tonight and found the English folk who had not seen the race as they got lost and wooed the fact that they didn't follow us. After a great day chasing the race tomorrow we head back towards Amsterdam with the bikes fully loaded again.

01.07.2012

Back into Holland

We have cycled back into Holland which is rather nice as Belgium, being a bit hillier, has not got the nice "fiets pads" (cycle ways) and their roads are a bit rougher. Also navigation is a lot harder in Belgium, because cycle maps and cycle-direction signage is hardly available.





We rode back towards Liege with a plan to ride around the south side of the city and find one of Belgium signed bike routes. We ended up riding up and up a ridge on the outskirts and not finding the start of the route. So the best option was to drop back down to the Mosel river and head north to Wezet (Vise in French), the next stage start for the Tour de France. This time the caravan at the start had not moved yet and the roads around were closed to cars so we rode through nice quiet roads with pedestrians as we dropped back down to the Maas river which we followed north for a while. We decided to have a coffee, head north-east and town-hopped our way to the Dutch border.

We never found a road leading into Holland until Vaals which took us on a funny sort of route as we ended up going eastward for a while. The terrain here is rolling hills and we did quite a bit of climbing up gentle slopes and enjoying reasonably long descents. This included almost climbing to the highest point in Holland, where Belgium, Germany and Holland come together at a whopping 321 meters! We had our first mechanical issue when Roel's bike started producing a rubbing noise from the back wheel. We quickly worked out that the wheel was not running true and rubbing on the brakes so it was out with the spoke wrench to loosen and tighten a couple of spokes before moving on.





It was late afternoon when we rolled in to Mickey and Chris's place at Landgraaf for the night. It is a picturesque place surrounded by a large park and plenty of trees. We have had a wonderful evening here with lots of beautiful food prepared by Chris and washed down with fine wines and beers! Mickey is a friend of BJ's who I met back in 1997 and we had so much fun "catching up" after a long time. Her house is HUGE even by our standards and we enjoyed a comfortable night not in the tent. She has the cutest little West Highland White Terrier called Bruce who has been entertaining us during the evening – he is a live wire!

Chris has plotted a route for us as we continue back to Amsterdam. It will take us over a couple of hills and then we're on the flat again.

02.07.2012

Late start and multiple border crossings

The unavoidable happened and we broke the pattern of getting up before 7 am to have an early start. There had been some discussion on what time we would have to leave and of course the only correct answer is, that we are on holiday, so there is no time limit. So we decided to have some Skype contact with Nigel and Mikayla before breakfast. The breakfast was of the same high standard as the dinner the night before and the conversation solved lots of world problems ranging from the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior to the situation in Zimbabwe where Mickey has met our family and has tried to help them with their difficult position of white farmers.

So, we did not get away until almost midday. That should not have been a problem, because Chris had prepared and printed a step-by-step route towards our next target: Oisterwijk in the Dutch province of North Brabant. So we made good progress, which took us to our surprise through part of Germany and again through part of Belgium, so four

border crossings within a couple of hours. These days those border crossings in Europe are hardly noticeable except for the fact, that the language of the signs changes. And as we knew already in Belgium the roads are boringly straight, or interrupted with road-works without clear signage for cyclists. So Chris' instructions did not work everywhere and the same happened back in Holland again where we switched to the option of just using cycle signs towards Eindhoven (where the Philips factories are).



We were also getting tired due to the late night and decided, that we did need a late lunch, because we had burnt up the energy from the late breakfast. We stopped in a place just south of Weert and had some krentenbollen (raisin buns) with cheese and strawberries (not both on the same bun). We carried on after covering ourselves with sunscreen, because the beautiful weather also started to take its toll. Then we realised, that we had to stock up on food for dinner and asked directions to a campground. The ladies at the flower shop where we enquired were very helpful and gave us directions to a 'camping at the farmer' with a possible alternative of a larger commercial campground. On our way to the small camp we spotted the large one across a paddock and we had seen a road further back, which was likely to lead there. So we backtracked and ended up on a dirt-road not unlike the ones we are used to in Woodhill. However, in Woodhill we never ride with the same kind of load on our bikes, so we slip-slided around the back of the campground along sandy loose farm tracks to the main entrance at the other side, which we probably could have reached much easier via sealed roads.



Anyway, we did a good 73 kms mostly in the right directions and dinner is with tinned baked-beans, goulash and peas taste quite nice after a day like that. We will be trying to get a posting loaded on the blog with limited Internet facilities and then an early night to be able to start early exploring some of the nicer scenery in Holland again tomorrow.

Greetings all!



06.07.2012

We have arrived back in Amsterdam!

We have had a series of shorter days so we could see a lot more of the country. Navigating from the GPS is proving problematic at times because if we have to detour around something like road-works it automatically seems to reroute down the motorway systems which can be a bit tricky. We have a really good map of Holland with all the cycle ways on it and tomorrow we hope to get similar ones for Germany and Denmark.

Following the cycle routes we suddenly found ourselves heading down a dirt driveway to a small river and a ferry to the other side where the fietspad (cycle-path) continued along the river. Some relaxed chaps were fishing off a small barge and offered us some coffee: "the ferryman will be here in a few minutes, he should have been here ten minutes ago". It was a nice spot and when the guy arrived a quarter of an hour later the fishing lines were pulled in and they found a roll of tickets somewhere as receipt for our passage. The ferryman told us that the estate across the river was owned by a baron who paid him for running his ferry for visitors. Di was quick to point out to him, that we had just doubled his pay! In the excitement he tried to take off with the boat still attached to its mooring, but eventually we got across.

Our route back took us through many small country towns which are so pretty. From our overnight at Soerendonk we zig-zagged our way north bypassing the larger towns and taking the tourist cycle paths through some nicely wooded areas that offered some protection from the sun. It is very hot here and we have had days where there have been no clouds! We rode through parts of Holland that are mainly for fruit growing and some of



the orchards have small stalls with fruit and jams for sale.

We moved from the rural areas into cycle trails that took us through some larger towns where we had our usual ride around looking for cans of gas and camping areas. Camping gas is hard to find in Holland after the explosion of the fireworks factory in Enschede a few years back, which resulted in legislation to make explosive materials secure. We camped just out of Amersfoort last night which had us much further east than we had planned, and opposite the Amersfoort Zoo. We had been told the lions would most likely wake us up, but they must have had a sleep-in because there didn't appear to be much noise from them. The camp owner was full of how well he looked after the facilities and the next morning I worked out he must have done all his cleaning with a water blaster as the toilets and showers were completely wet from walls to ceilings. The only thing dry was the floor which must have had under tile heating!

When we woke it was a bit overcast and slight drizzle. We set off northward through more beautiful wooded areas where most of the trails were dirt paths. We dodged around the larger towns and headed across to an area of open heather and sand hills. This area is criss-crossed with narrow paths that were a pleasure to ride on and although light rain was falling we enjoyed the area. This would be MTBO paradise with all the crossing trails!

It wasn't long before we hit the outskirts of Amsterdam and back into the hubbub of the city. Now we need to get some things sorted for the next long trip up to Norway and clean some gear.

This trip to test our setup involved just over 800 kms riding through predominantly flat countryside.

THE MAIN EVENT



10.07.2012

Day one en route to Norway

Today we departed Amsterdam on our journey to Norway. The weather is overcast and the forecast is for rain, however the bonus is that we should get the wind in our backs most of the way north. We are taking an easterly route through the Utrechtse Heuvelrug (which we came through in the rain on our return last week from Belgium), before turning northwest and following the main eastern dyke to our overnight at Elburg. The ride along the dyke was nice as we came through several old fishing villages. Spakenburg was the first one we came to and it had a lovely town centre where the old Botter boats are moored. Not far from this point was a boatyard with a couple of Bidders pulled up on ramps being restored. Further along the canal we came across two out sailing.



We stopped for lunch in Harderwijk and tried to find a ship museum that Roel thought was close by but no one seemed to know much about it. From Harderwijk we went inland to sample some of the Veluwe forest area. This took us in a wide arch around Nunspeet through some beautiful bushy areas on cycle-only routes. Sometimes the routes take in a bit of back tracking but we get to see plenty of interesting things, lots of birds in many species and the odd deer as well. Just before our destination at Elburg the rain started but we got the tent up between showers.

It is interesting how some of these camping grounds function. You need to carry loo paper as that isn't supplied. Initially we were charged for a full site with electricity etc but the check-in girl realised later that we weren't requiring that and reduced the price. The campings have no shelters or cooking areas. Apparently people in tents eat at the restaurants attached to the camp grounds. For us it can be tricky cooking in the tent when it's wet but we still managed a good meal. The shower operated off a magnetic key system which is great if you understand the instructions (I still have difficulty with some Dutch). I worked out how to turn the contraption on but turning it off was a different story! As Roel's portion of the water was steadily going down the drain (and I was trying to get dry) I finally sorted it out by holding the magnet for longer on the sensor! Roel still managed a warm shower after all this drama! We had an early night after covering 112km s today and fell asleep with the gentle pitter-patter of the rain on the tent.



11.07.2012

Canals and rock piles

Today we woke to a couple of showers but it was dry to prepare breakfast just outside the tent. We have had a good practise at packing the panniers inside the tent so everything stays dry. We got on the road at about 8.15 and not long after the rain came down. Both of us were into our wet weather gear which we have spent most of the day in. The rain has come mainly in showers and usually gives us an excuse to stop for a coffee!

We have continued north towards Kampen and on to Zwartsluis. At Zwartsluis we were redirected because of road-works to a route through Giethoorn. The roading guy at the entrance to Zwartsluis advised us where to get a coffee and also of the scenic route through Giethoorn and as we progressed into town we passed another roading chap who told us we were on the right track. From all accounts the first one had told the second one about us via his radio! We chatted with the first fellow for quite a while about our trip through Belgium and the Tour de France and our plans to go to Norway. He was quite impressed.

The trip through Giethoorn was fascinating. It is a place where the houses are all below sea level by around 10 meters. They are surrounded by canals and they all have boats as the means of transport. The bike path had small bridges that could be lifted every 20 meters or so. The entire township was originally built in swamp land and needs the canals to be able to pump excess water out. The place is quite a tourist attraction with boat hire so you can travel around the canals and view the place from the water.

We continued on our way through to Havelterberg where we came across some ancient rocks neatly stacked up with two rows and a layer balanced on top. Kind of like Stonehenge but a long skinny arrangement rather than round. It turns out they are boulders from the ice age that have been dug up and used as gravestones. To find out more about the origins etc. <http://www.missgien.net/stone-age/hunebedden.html>

After leaving the "hunebeds" we headed across to Appelscha, our target for the day, and



came through more open park land that had a big viewing tower. This had a couple of levels and was well worth the climb to the top. It looked across a series of lakes and sand dunes that are covered in walking tracks and bike trails.

The day had been a long one with 115km s covered and periods of rain, but we still have the wind in our backs!

12.07.2012

Dodging the rain and bird watching

We woke to more wet weather today but did manage to have breakfast and pack up between showers. The main objective was to get to visit Roel's cousin Pony and Marjan in Haren and then move onwards to the German border in the afternoon.

After getting down the road for about an hour in light showers it started to look like it was drying out and I decided to get out of my wet weather pants. Roel had spied a bird viewing hide along a side track while I was doing this and we shot down and had a look, taking the bikes with us. The skies opened just after so we sat watching several types of ducks, swallows and a cute wren for 45 minutes until it stopped raining enough to carry on. I also put the wet weather pants back on!

We had a coffee stop further down the road to avoid another drenching!



After a very pleasant visit to Pony and Marjan, and the rest of their extended family staying on holiday with them, we departed after lunch and headed to Midwolda for the night. We came to a bridge that was up over one of the canals and watched as a huge barge passed through. It is amazing where these massive things go. It had about a foot to spare on each side as it passed us by!

We covered a further 87km s, mostly off road paths, and have found a well setup camping for the night.

13.07.2012

Riding in the rain all day

Roel and I woke this morning to yet another day of light rain on the tent. This time we both rolled over and decided unanimously a sleep-in was in order! We were able to go to a covered area for breakfast (when we finally had to get out) and packed up in the drizzle. The old Macpac Olympus tent is serving us well and keeping us dry although we have a broken pole which is holding up with the one patch sleeve we have with us. We will need to make sure we have a spare patch tube from somewhere in case we have another breakage. However even though it is wet we are still seeing some great countryside.

Today we rode the last 30 kms or so to the border with Germany and crossed over at Nieuweschans which is an old village with a canal harbour in the center and houses along each side. I could imagine that in past years the fishing boats would have come and gone from here and sold their catches along the harbour side.

After Nieuweschans the drizzle turned to persistent light rain that continued for the rest of the day. We travelled through Bunde, Weener and followed a large canal to Leer.

The countryside up here is very rural and the farms are large. The houses are often 1880's buildings and the front end is the human living area with the remainder a large barn for the cattle. Most farms seemed to be a combination of grains/vegetable crops and dairy cows. Some of the cows wore bells and there was a gentle ringing as they grazed when we rode past.

At Leer we took shelter in a cafe for lunch and then crossed over to a different cycle trail and headed north. Germany has several cycle networks in the area and we got a map that has these in detail. It does mean we cover a lot of extra kms due to the extra turns and places we get taken to that are a bit off the straight through route we had originally planned, but navigation is significantly easier.

Just out of Hatshausen I spotted two letterbox numbers created by my previous employer Janet Parr, on a wood box beside a driveway. These ceramic tiles are available from souvenir stores all over New Zealand and it was great to see some of them had made their way to this side of the world!

In the shed across from the wood box was another overhang that had a bike that contained



a bird nest in the seat – most likely owned by someone who must be quite clucky!

The rain was getting to us a bit and as we entered Timmel we came across a horse who looked just as miserable in someone's front yard.

We had a short chat with it and then carried on until we found a camping ground just on the edge of town. It is well equipped – the tent area even has a small cabin with tables to eat at and more importantly to dry out in.

Dinner consisted of saurkraut, potato and German sausage bought from a mobile truck-shop selling meat and veges to the locals. The guy inside was quite interested in what we are doing too.

Due to the late start and the wet weather we only covered 70km s today but tomorrow we hope we can get a bit further and have drier weather.

14.07.2012

Bremerhaven

We still woke to an overcast day but at least at this stage the rain was staying away. We got on the road quite early but shortly after we got the first lot of rain and took shelter in a cafe for a while and took the opportunity to update the blog and stock up on some of the food items. The aim for the day was to get to Bremerhaven and we took a route through some quiet back roads using the GPS to hop from one town to the next as we didn't have a map for the short area around the bottom of Wilhelmshaven. We aimed for Varel and then just headed across country to Nordenham where we crossed the Weser river by ferry. It is incredible how many ferries go back and forth here.

After crossing into Bremerhaven in the early evening we were pretty keen to get to a camping ground and set up for the night. We got directions to one on the east side and headed off down a side road of the local autobahn. It was a bit out of town but after travelling along this road for several kms it came to a dead end! At this point we decided we had ridden enough for the day (112 kms) and put the tent up in long grass just off the motorway. It was a tad noisy during the night but we got a reasonable sleep and it wasn't too wet.



15.07.2012

Bumping in to kiwi mates!

Today we had two more ferry crossings to get to our destination at Brunsbüttel and the last part would be about 30 kms into the wind. The day started a bit showery but by lunchtime it had dried out and we got out of the wet weather gear. We travelled through Marschkamp, Kurhstedt, Lintig (coffee break here), Varrel, Hemmoor and up to Wischhafen to catch the ferry across the Elbe River.

On the way around we came past one of Germany's nuclear power stations which was in the process of being shut down as a result of the Japanese problems at Fukushima. The people here must fear the repercussions of an accident quite a bit because they have relied on nuclear reactors as a source of power for some time. There are heaps of windmills so I guess they are looking to wind to supply energy.

About this time we got a call from our friends Rob and Marquita who are travelling through to Sweden for orienteering and we arranged to meet up at Brunsbüttel for the night. They have a camper van and we joined them for a nice sit-down-on-normal-seats meal.



We also caught up on the recent successes of our orienteering buddies. Matt Ogden has won our first medal at a world orienteering championship with a win at the junior champs – outstanding. Rob and Marquita have both been having great success with the mountain bike orienteering in preparation for the MTBO world champs that Marquita is competing in. During the French five day competition Rob placed first in his M60 age group and Marquita placed in the open womens. Marquita’s parent Chris and Yett Gelderman have also been there and they were the only competitors in the 70’s grade but they had a great reception at the prize-giving. New Zealand orienteering is doing really well at the moment!



We had a bit of a challenge finding the camping at Brunsbuttel and were helped along by a friendly local who guided us through town to the main road along the dyke to the camping. We arrived at the same time that Rob and Marquita pulled in.



16.07.2012

Brunsbüttel to Tönning

Rob and Marquita headed off to their orienteering challenges and we headed north to Denmark. It was great to catch up with our close mates so far from home!



The day was dry but we had the most hideous wind from the west to contend with. We initially went north-west towards Marne and north to Meldorf along the main road which had a cycle path attached to it. By the time we got to Meldorf we were sick of the cars as well as the wind and decided to go to Tönning for the night. From Meldorf we were punching into a very strong headwind but then turned to the north and followed the North Sea Cycle route along the dyke.

We stopped at a cafe which was run by a very friendly lady, and had coffee and apple pie. She told us it had been a very bad summer as the tourists were staying away because of the weather. The beach cafes all have seats that are basically a seat and shelter combined

and most of the ones we passed had several of these that were blown over.

We got to the campground at Tønning at a reasonable hour and after 80 kms and met with Kate. She is from England and has set off on a cycle holiday with no set plan or destination, and she is having a great time. She has done lots of travelling by hitchhiking through Australia, New Zealand and South America but this is her first time by bike. We compared lots about how we were organising ourselves. She was like us and enjoyed a conversation in English and so we had a pleasant evening chatting and exchanging ideas.

17.07.2012

Tønning to Klanxbull

We discussed options for travelling north and Kate put us onto a web site that has cycle routes only on it. She was also tired of the wind and wet and had decided to stay put for a day. We looked at the possibility of jumping on a train if it was wet. When we turned in for the night the heavens had opened (what's new) but we woke to find a sunny morning and very little wind. As we have had a few long days we looked at the option of going on to Husum which is about 27 kms up the road as it has a McDonalds to update the blog.

We got McD's to find, after purchasing meals, that their Internet was down. We tried to fix the problem with the store manager but with no success. At this point we also decided to take the train 43 kms up the road to Niebull so we were a bit closer to Denmark without breaking ourselves riding into the wind. It was a 28 minute train ride and when we got to Niebull we had another 17km s on the bike to a camp ground. The kilometers for the day were 57 on the bike and 43 on the train .

The camping ground is a farmers camping with a shed to cook in which has a sink, and showers and toilets are attached to the main house. Nice and cheap and a pleasant spot for the night. Tomorrow we cross to Denmark and carry on north.



18.07.2012

Klanxbull to Darum

We have crossed into Denmark early in the ride today. The day has dawned dry so we are hoping to dry out a bit on the way today. After crossing the border at Rudbol we got ourselves back on the north sea cycle route that we hope to follow to Hirtshals. The plan was to get the maps for



this in Denmark but it took us until Ribe before we found a town with an information centre where we could get the book.

The ride to Ribe was a flat one as expected and we had a mixture of paths and gravel tracks following the dyke. There were a lot of gates to open and close as we tried to follow the route via the signage which was not always at each junction. We got a bit off track and came across a Belgium couple at a church and we went inside to have a look. It was very old and had fantastic carved altar and the ceiling was painted.

We had a quick look at the map the Belgians had and then continued to Ribe.



We must have lost the track at some stage because we got to a road crossing and had to unload the bikes to be able to get them over a fence! A bit of a time waster!

We entered Ribe at 1.30pm. It is an ancient harbour city which is currently under some restoration. We found our way into the center and there was an archaeological dig taking place, and repaving around the church. Some of the old clocks were still working and the buildings are characterized by a very warped appearance. It was a very nice place to stop for lunch and to get the map book for the rest of our ride through Denmark.

By the time we got to the camping just south of Esbjerg we were saturated again.



We met up with a German fellow who was busy fixing his 6th puncture for the day! He was so sick of the weather that he had decided to go back home by train the next day. We had a nice evening chatting with him though. He was quite curious to know what the weather was like in New Zealand. We had a few laughs when I told him it was pretty much the same probably wet and a bit colder.



19.07.2012

Danish west coast and the sand dunes

This morning it was dry and we packed up and got on the road early. Our German friend came and wished us a good trip and also to tell us he would be continuing his trip up Denmark. We covered the 15 or so kms to Esbjerg quite quickly but just as we arrived in the city it started to pour with rain. We had planned to get to McDonalds there to upload blogs, pay bills and check emails so it worked out well. It was also pretty quiet in there too.

We had completed all the blogging etc by Lunchtime and the rain had cleared into something of a nice day! We stopped to look at the "Man meets the sea" sculpture on the outskirts of the city. It is a nine meter high piece that is a popular attraction. We had lunch and continued our way towards the coastal sand dune part of the route. Along the way Roel and I both wondered if the German had indeed gone home when the rain came.



The countryside was significantly nicer up here with quiet back-roads and a variety of landscapes. Our route took us through a large part of the military zone which was a nice off road trail criss-crossed by tank tracks. A lot of the buildings in this part had boarded up windows that were painted to look like windows – probably military assets.

We made our way through the dunes which were very similar to Woodhill forest but minus the trees. They have a lot of grasses that keep the erosion to a minimum. We turned down a small side track to our overnight camping, which looked quite small from a distance, but turned out to be huge! It was a windy night and the poor old tent flapped continuously. But if you ride 66km s into the wind not many things keep you awake!

20.07.2012

Dunes and closed cafes!

We woke to a lot of wind which was coming from the north-west and quite chilly. It also meant that we would be riding into it during the day! We continued along the dunes which was mainly an off road sand track. The sand was hard packed but it still took more effort to pedal than the road. It has some nice undulations in it, which would have been much nicer if it wasn't for the stiff wind. At least it was a pleasant change to the completely flat ride we have had this far.

We pedaled through many of the Danish holiday homes that are tucked away in the dunes. They are in clusters but don't appear to have any shops or cafes within their villages. We were hanging out to have a break from the cold wind and get our coffee fix when we spied a museum with a café. After crossing the very busy road (there is only one in this area - full of holiday makers) to find it didn't open for another 1½ hours. A bit further along was another camping ground with café so we called in there. That one didn't open for another ½ hour so we decided to wait. The staff were quite taken with the fact that we came from New Zealand and that we are doing our travelling by bike. The young girl who made our coffees had previously visited New Zealand and is saving to make another trip so we had a lovely chat with her about her previous trip.

We also caught up with our Belgium friends as they continued north. They had got so sick of the wind and the gravel and sand tracks that they took the road option with the cars. They said it was very busy but they were happier with their progress. We covered 87km s and tonight we have ended up at the same camping ground at Vederso Klit.

21.07.2012

The ship wreck coast

We got away from camp at 8 am. The wind was still howling and we steeled ourselves for the long day ahead. The plan was to get to Agger which is the top of the exposed dunes area. All along the coast here are townships that are fishing centres. There are several lighthouses dotted along the way as well which have played a major role in making the coast safe. All the ports had at least one SAR (Search and Rescue) boat tied up as well. The seas at the moment are wild as the wind is up around 40 knots (the reason we are not getting through here as quickly as we would have liked!). We came past a memorial to 854 people killed on 24.12.1811 on the ship St George - a British passenger vessel. 12 people from the vessel were rescued.

On the same day 4.7km s further north the ship Defence, from the same line, also foundered and this brought the total of casualties to



almost 1400. Many of the dead are buried along the dunes. It was a terrible tragedy and inspired the construction of a lot of the lighthouses here.

When we crossed the opening to Nissum Bredning on the ferry we could feel the North Sea swells as the sea was breaking over the front of the boat and the thing was rolling around. This is the only place where there does not appear to be a lock or sea wall to protect the inland areas.

We covered 76km s of which most of it was into this very strong wind along this exposed but beautiful coast.

22.07.2012

Last two amazing days in Denmark

Today the weather pattern has changed to provide us with a dry day and tailwinds – Yippee! At one stage we were in cycling heaven with a separate cycle path with humpty doos (ups and downs of a gentle rolling nature) and tailwind.

We entered the Thy National park and spent the entire day cycling through it. Thy is Denmark's largest national park and includes several old fishing villages which are now more tourist attractions with a few operating boats. These are mainly small wooden boats that are pulled up onto the beach at the end of the day. The old village at Stenbjerg has been preserved with all the old buildings where the fish was sold from and where the fishermen maintained their boats.

We met a woman here who was very knowledgeable and she gave us quite a bit of chit chat about the area. All this was on the beach with the boats in a chilly wind where we were both clothed in cycling gear and she and her husband were in puffer jackets!

We climbed the lighthouse at Hanstholm and had some great views of where we have been and where we were headed.





We next had a short sharp climb up on to the limestone outcrop at Bulbjerg. From here we could see a spot where the Kittywakes (birds) nest. There was also a lot of German bunkers tucked into the dunes and the locals have turned the one at the end of the limestone outcrop into an information center.

The dunes are a constant problem with the erosion and during the 1800's they moved around, largely due to farmers allowing stock to graze on the grasses, and destabilising them. Since a program of replanting the grasses has been put in place the area is much more protected. Efforts to grow trees have been pretty fruitless as the climate is too cold and the winds are very strong.

Thy is also a great place for the migratory wading birds to stop at. We have seen quite a lot of birdlife during the trip in the marshy areas and lakes here.

After spending lots on camping Roel and I were pretty keen to find a spot in the forest to put the tent up. There are primitive, free campsites in this area so we kept a lookout for one as we got towards the end of the day. We came across a shelter in the bush not far from the cycle track and spent a nice night free of any noise in a log style lean-to. The perfect place after 118 kms riding.





23.07.2012

Boats on beaches

Today has been another great days riding. We had a nice night tucked up in our cute hut for the night. We headed off a bit later than usual and shortly after getting on the road we came across a small windmill at Grønnestrand which was a bit odd. It was used to mill grain and had an outer coating of heather. The vanes had silk covers attached when it was used but today it only has the frames.

We came across more fishing boats pulled up on the beach and this time the winch was set up and connected to a couple of these boats. The sea state today was a lot calmer than previous days but there was still a good breeze blowing along the beach.

We came across a family of two adults and five kids on a cycling holiday at another one of the primitive campsites. The older kids at about 9-10 years all had small panniers on their bikes and the youngest one was tied in to a trailer. Awesome to see a family having such a neat time on holiday!

I wasn't too sure about a 15km portion of the days ride which involved riding along the beach from Blokhus to Lokken. By the time we got there it was blowing from behind and



the sand was so firm that there were heaps of cars on it. Sand was blowing everywhere and burying anything that happened to be left on the ground. We covered the beach section in about 45 mins and were glad to be off it in the end.

[Roel: In New Zealand we don't know of any place where we would be keen to ride on the beach, but here so many cars went on it, that it was quite firmly packed. The wind pushed us along with sand floating low over the beach. We continued for the full 15 kms with only a few very small streams to cross. And all the way along there were people swimming, kite-flying, trying to get a tan behind wind-barriers, windsurfing etc. All spread out every 100 meters or so.]

Lokken was a real tourist beach town and we took the opportunity to stock up food and have a coffee. Roel also thought it might be a good idea to check the sailings for the ferry to Denmark which turned out to be a good idea! The sailings were fully booked except for one tonight at 11.30pm so we booked it.

We still had a lot of daylight left to get up to Hirtshals so we stopped at a primitive campsite to cook some dinner before carrying on. There were 4 other cyclists there and one pair were a Dutch couple heading to Norway as well. They are taking it a little more gently than us but they also started from Holland about a month ago.

We are now at Hirtshals, 109 kms on the route today, and the ferry has been delayed due to rough sea conditions (funny that!) so we are catching up with the blog.

Tomorrow we will be in Norway! Denmark has been wonderful. Great people and sssooooo pretty even if a tad windy and wet to start with.



24.07.2012

Time to hit the hills - we are in Norway!

We got to Kristiansand, Norway, at 8.30 this morning after a crossing from Hirtshals that had quite a few passengers grabbing the sea sick bags. At one stage it looked like the supply could well run out.

Roel and I must have a bad sense of balance as we weren't affected at all. In fact it was not much rougher than what can be experienced in Tiri channel back home.

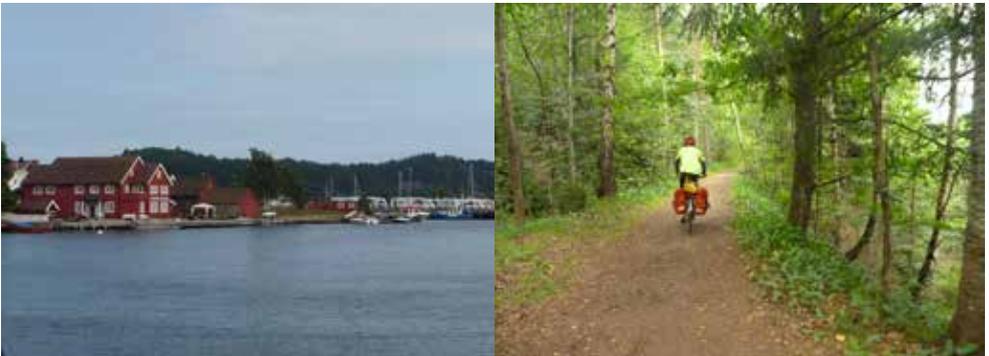
We headed off for breaky in the shadow of the city's cathedral and then shot off to find the information centre to get the cycle route maps we needed to get up to Larvik. Then it was on the road out of town and heading north. Well so we thought! After travelling along the side of a river Roel could make no sense of the map and stopped to analyse the situation. I had been distracted by a decorative man hole cover and duly rode off to photograph it. A dude in a small truck that carefully drove around me (I was in the middle of the road, astride the bike, photographing a man-hole cover..!) must have looked at the situation and decided there and then we needed help in some form. He carefully pointed out that we had not crossed the large bridge over the fjord but turned up a side river instead. So a bit of a back-track there.

Once we were out of town we effectively did more climbing up hills than we have done during the trip so far! It is a bit of a shock to the system but we decided to go conservatively until the legs have got used to the extra loading with all the gear.

We basically travelled from Kristiansand east to Hones, north to Birkeland, and then south east to Lillesand.

At Birkeland we stopped for some lunch by a wood pile that had a bundle of wild raspberry plants with ripe fruit nearby. We spent a bit of time getting stuck into these tasty morsels!

We managed to dodge a 40 meter hill shortly after by taking a wrong turn and ending up in a school. While we were there figuring out what we had done wrong a couple of guys wandered over and suggested we carried on through the school on to an old railway that was now a local path that would take us around the hill and back onto the main road we were supposed to be on. It was a really nice gravel track very similar to the Otago Rail Trail.





We reached Lillesand late afternoon and were pretty keen to do some washing and have a shower so after a quick coffee and bun we found the only camping area. We both nearly died at the amount they wanted for the night but we are so tired from a couple of hard days and the previous night with very little sleep that we decided to splash out and treat ourselves to some comforts tonight and rough it the rest of the time. Norway is unbelievably expensive. They charge per person, then add a ludicrous amount for the tent space, charge extra for showers, washing machines, driers and Internet. So we paid for the tent and ourselves, shared the shower (which drew some funny looks from other women in the camp when Roel appeared out of the shower with me). We then washed the clothes in the plugless hand basin (used up heaps of water) and I'm afraid you have had to wait for the blog to be updated.

But in saying this Norway is beautiful and we have met very nice helpful people here. The weather is nice and sunny and no wind! We look out over rocky islands with fir trees down to the water and simple houses dotted along the shores. Lillesand is a lovely seaside town with nice old wooden buildings of which most are painted white. There are heaps of small pleasure boats in marinas all around town.

Total distance today was 61km s – a bit less than usual now we are hitting some hills. Tomorrow we will continue our trip up the south-east coast.

25.07.2012

Lillesand to Kragero

We rode from Lillesand to Tvedestrand, 83 kms along the coast. Shortly after leaving Lillesand the route took us off the road and onto a gravel road which was really pretty. We passed through a salmon dam soon after turning off the tar-seal. It looked quite old and had several steps so the fish could find their way up to the lake. The signposting for some parts of the route can be poor and we tend to take a guess at which way we need to turn at junctions. During one of these





head scratching sessions a guy on a mountain-bike pulled up and said he would ride to Grimstad with us and show us the way. He was a really nice bloke and explained how this road was part of the “King’s road” from old times. He was also very interested in what we were doing. Unfortunately he was leaving later in the morning for a holiday in Malta with his wife so he apologised for not inviting us for a coffee. He lived in Grimstad and was full of interesting anecdotes about the city as we rode into it. We parted here but thoroughly enjoyed his company.

All the towns along here have huge water traffic. Everyone seems to own a boat and there are heaps of boat parking places so the cafes do good business from this traffic. Boats can be modern fibreglass runabouts to boats built in the 1800’s. Beautiful varnished timber boats of all shapes and sizes. The water here is also incredibly clear when you see how much boating is done and the people are very tidy. Very little rubbish.

After leaving Grimstad we headed for Arendal which is much bigger but pretty much the same.... white-washed buildings and seaside Cafes and restaurants. Every corner here presents a photo stop and so it will begin to be hard to pick which ones go one the blog!

At the end of the day we took off up a side road in Tvedestrand only to find out from a local that the lake we were heading for was a town water supply – so out of bounds – and also that mozzies are bad around freshwater lakes. Good info to know!! He recommended a paddock just along the road further with some “sheeps” in it. When we got there a couple were walking out form the paddock and they told us the “sheeps” were particularly intimidating and chased them when they had gone to the cherry tree to pick cherries. She thought they were hungry and needed more food but I told her they would be after the cherries. As soon as we went anywhere near the tree these 9 sheep rushed over for the opportunity of getting some cherries. It was quite a job to deter them. They were very persistent!

We cooked dinner on a rocky outcrop and later tried to pitch the tent in the same place but it was too rocky to get the pegs in or get the tent straight enough to sleep in. We did have a nice night’s sleep in the paddock with the sheep who now knew we were not likely to feed them.



26.07.2012

Today we have continued north-east and are currently in Kragero. We have crossed the fjords by ferries on two occasions today. They are short trips but nice to see some of these places from the water.

We have passed through Risør and had a long stop here to have some morning tea beside the marina. We were alongside an old rescue boat built in 1897. This has been beautifully restored and seemed to be sailed by a couple who could well live in it. The ferry to Oysang went from here and was an old timber vessel too.

After hopping off the ferry it was up a steep hill and off to Stabbestad for the next ferry. On the way we had a roadside nibble on wild raspberries which allowed a couple of skiers on rollerblades to catch up with us. They were moving along pretty quickly as they trained for cross country skiing which is a major sport here.

We had a short wait for the ferry to Kragero but the trip, with a couple of short stops at some of the islands, was nice. The ferry was the most top heavy ship I have seen and would only be suitable for very calm waters!

From here we will look for somewhere to camp overnight.

27.07.2012

Up early, uphill, up bridges, up costs

We were both very worn out at the end of yesterday (83 kms covered), most likely due to not enough eating on the way but we had a good night's sleep and woke well refreshed this morning. We have decided that trying to manage the video conversions on Nigel's old computer is too time consuming so we will most likely process these when we get back to Holland, or if possible when we are at official camping grounds. In between we will endeavour to maintain the blog whenever we can get Internet access .

[Roel: We have followed the cycle trail from Kristiansand to Larvik for most of the way, which

has taken us through amazing scenery. It did mean, that we covered many more kilometers than we originally planned. All the extra fjord-zigzags and ridge climbs have also meant more effort and slower riding, so we are slightly behind schedule. The schedule is not fixed and we are not expecting to get all the way to Nordkaap now, which is not a problem. The scenery here is great anywhere. We are keen to get to the Lofoten, if we can. From here on, we expect, that we have not so much choice to deviate from the original plan but anything can happen. Now (Saturday) is wet (after some really nice and hot days) and if that rain continues we may take the train to move on a bit.]

Now here are the day's details. We carried on north for a while before switching back and going south and heading north again before stopping for the night. This route took us through Brevik.

We also took a detour from the cycle route we have been following and cut off a bit of back tracking although this took us on to the main road for about 4 kms. This was a bit unnerving as the cars were going past quite fast. Over here the cars allow a good 1.5 meters when going around us and I was more concerned that they would hit oncoming cars as there always appears to be about 15 cm between. It was good to turn off this road and on to a quieter gravel road.

That was until we turned a corner and were confronted with a push up to 75meters! There was a family out training for a 10km run in Oslo and they stopped to chat when we were about 2/3 of the way up which gave us a bit of a brake. Nice people very interested in New Zealand and what we are up to.

We had a nice morning tea stop at a table and chairs on the side of the road which must have been placed there by the owner of the house nearby. It was so nice to have this to sit at for a change instead of a rocky place.

We had lunch in Brevik alongside one of the marinas. To get to Brevik we had dropped down to Stathelle and observed the high level bridge across the fjord. I said to Roel that we would need to climb back up to cross over which was probably 60 or so meters! We had stunning views from the bridge once we had got up to it so it was well worth the effort. Adjacent to this is the motorway bridge that entered a tunnel that took the cars around Brevik.





We have been roughing it for the last two nights, as it is expensive to go to camping grounds, and when we passed this really inviting freshwater pool we decided to get in. It was cold but very refreshing to have a dip in the middle of the day and to get the clothes dried before we turned in for the night.

We hope to free-camp again tonight as the weather is still superb, but it is forecast to change tomorrow and we hope to get a camping ground with TV to watch the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

Total kms today was 62.

28.07.2012

A wet day with a happy dry ending

Today, as forecast here, it rained and rained and rained! We packed up the gear which thankfully was under some quite dense tree cover and headed 20km s down the road to Larvik. There we took shelter in a cafe for 3.5 hours. It was not a cheap stop – the filled rolls we bought for lunch cost us New Zealand\$15.00 each! But we did get Internet access and dry.

On the way to Larvik I broke the cable to the front gears so we looked for a bike shop in Larvik for a repair. We do carry all the gear

but I didn't fancy doing the repair in the cold and wet if it could be possible to avoid it. Roel found one by way of Google. There didn't appear to be a bike shop in Larvik but he got onto someone else's cycle trip blog and they had a photo of a shop in it. From there he googled the address of one of the other shops in the photo and established a street address. The next thing we had to do was find the street. So we both looked out the window and bingo we were sitting on the corner of it! This had us in stitches as we had tried to locate other addresses via the street map with little success.

When we got to SykkelGlede at 19 Nansetgate the guys there supplied us with the cable and then did the repair for us for nothing. The one we were dealing with had been helped out in Australia when he travelled and had made a point of helping us out in return Norwegians are just great people.

We also decided to get a tarp to go under the tent to protect the floor at the free camping stops and to stop it from getting so damp with the rain.

Then we moved on north along the Lagen River (in the rain). This is Norway's second biggest river and is famous for the salmon fishing. Each year about 20 metric tons of fish are taken from the river but these are also restocked each year. You need a license to fish the rivers and lakes which can be costly but I'm pretty sure Roel will want to have a go before we come home!

The camping site we stayed at was next to this river and we watched fishing activities in the evening after setting up the tent and having dinner. This campground is called Holmfoss by Kvelde and is specifically for the people doing the salmon fishing. We saw two of the fish caught that day: quite big, but the guys said those were only small ones. One of the photos on the site showed, that they may be right.



When we arrived at the camping ground the lady that greeted us was amazed that we wanted to tent rather than book a cabin. It had stopped raining by dinner time and we could also dry some of the gear out in the shower block.

We did get in 70 kms for the day and they were all wet ones. We had our usual problems getting out of the built up areas when we seemed to complete several circuits of Larvik.

29.07.2012

Today has been superb weather again. We got well dried out before leaving the camping ground at 10am and continued on our way up towards Kongsberg. The plan was to stop somewhere along the way and free camp before getting too close to the township.

We also planned to continue following the Lagen River, but on the quiet roads along the number 5 cycle route to Geilo. As we have often found out the signage is not always sensible, or at times not existing. Shortly after passing through Svarstad we missed a turn and ended up taking a slightly shorter route but this did involve 750 meters of climbing, which is about double of what we should have been doing. We also came across cattle on the road - they had bells on and as they ran along the road ahead of us they made a hell of a din!.



We covered 56km s today which is quite a bit shorter than usual but we had a late start and both of us were pretty jaded from yesterdays wet effort.

We have found a nice spot to spend the night about 16 kms to Kongsberg where we hope to upload this post to the blog. While we were setting up the dinner I accidentally stepped on the camera and broke the protective cover for the lens. It still seems to take pics but it won't be waterproof so there may not be as many photos from now on.

We expect to have reasonable weather for the next couple of days and then it is forecast to be wet again.

30.07.2012

Kongsberg, Norway

We woke up to another nice day. We had a quick breakfast and got underway, because some tiny midgees were bugging us. We crossed the river again to make a detour from the highway 40. The secondary roads are much nicer to ride with very little traffic, but add usually 20 to 30 percent more distance and climb to the journey.

We arrived in Kongsberg this afternoon after a reasonably flat ride compared with yesterday. We traveled on the east side of the river this time and did not make any unintended deviations up on the ridge.

Kongsberg is a beautiful city that straddles the Lagen River. We took the opportunity to get washing done and spend a bit of time in the library researching the options from here. Due to the forecast turning nasty we are trying to get the train from Hokksund to Geilo to start the Rallarvegen Trail on Wednesday if conditions have come right. The people at the information site at Kongsberg directed us to Hokksund to meet the train but getting the ticket is proving troublesome as they don't include bikes at the automatic ticket machines and we haven't been able to book on line.

We rode a total of 76 kms of largely easy flat roads and a wickedly nice downhill from Kongsberg to Hokksund!



31.07.2012

We finally sorted out our train tickets to Geilo. What a mission! We got the tickets sorted by the information center people at Hokksund and were on the train shortly after lunch. The conductor on the train had not been told we had booked and so was not expecting us, or the bikes. After roughly tossing them on board in a hurry, with a result of Roel's head light being smashed, we were allowed to secure them and then went to the carriage to enjoy the rest of the trip up to Geilo. We had been told we could book a Eurail pass from Geilo as it is a manned station, which meant we would be able to have the return to Amsterdam sorted before continuing north. When we got to Geilo the manned station was closed – it should have been open for another 1.5 hours which was rather embarrassing for the conductor of the following train when I quizzed him about the opening hours. He suggested we sorted it out when we got to Voss in a few days time.

After much frustration we carried on down the road in the rain to find a spot to spend the night. We camped just off the road next to a stream. The weather in Geilo was wet, but the forecast for the next day was good. We could see patches of snow on the mountains we were going to ride.



01.08.2012

Rallarvegen Trail

We got on the road early so we would get to Haugastol (25km s) to start the Rallarvegen Trail at a reasonable hour. It was still overcast when we got to Haugastol and quite cold.

The start of the Rallarvegen Trail at Haugastol was a busy place with the bike hire business going flat out, very similar to Clyde at the Otago Rail Trail. We found a place to park the bikes while we got a coffee and a map of the trail.

We put on a bit of extra clothing and headed off along the trail. It is the old access road



from the time when the Norwegians built the railway from Oslo to Bergen in the early 1900's. It was a massive engineering task at the time and the materials for the construction of surveyor's and worker's houses were pulled up by horses from Flam before the railway construction could start. The bike trail is along that road next to the railway line, about 80 kms long.

The trail climbs to the highest point just past Finse at 1343m above sea level, but it is a gradual ascent on a well formed gravel road. The scenery is stunning. As we climbed higher we could see across to the high hills of the Hardanger Jokulen that still had snow in patches. The area is filled with lakes, rivers and cascading waterfalls. The day progressively got better and every turn in the trail presented another photo opportunity. This was most definitely the Norwegian landscape I had looked forward to. Complete remoteness and tundra type wilderness.

Along the route the linesmen's houses that were placed every 3 kms apart have been converted to cafes where food and coffee could be purchased. Roel and I stopped at one and got the billy out for our lunch stop and you wouldn't believe what happened next. Our friends Rob, Marquita and Karen turned up! They had read on our blog that we planned to do the trail today and thought they could catch up with us somewhere along the way. Rob brought us all a round of waffles which were great and we caught up with some of the gossip from their travels before they continued their ride down to Flam. It was a highlight of the day to have such a nice surprise visit.



We continued along and as we got higher up the trail still had odd spots of snow on it that required some pushing of the bikes to get through. We were also catching up with other people who were carrying gear over and tenting on the way and often we stopped to have chats with them. We also met a group of Dutch one-day riders there who we very interested in what we are doing. We came across them at the highest point shortly before they headed back the way they had come.

We stopped for dinner at one of the linesmen's houses, which was now a cabin which slept 30 people. The custodian told us that most people ride across the trail stay in the houses and buy the food instead of camping. It cost a small fortune to do this. When I asked the guy there if it was possible to wash our dishes in the sink he wanted 50 kr so I politely said no thanks and we wandered down to the river.

We found a nice spot beside a lake for the night knowing that the weather was going to turn wet again.

But the day had been sensational and has to be the highlight so far of the trip. Rallarvegen lived up to all the expectations. *[Roel: I have been through the length of Norway three times, but this day was more awesome than any I have seen before in Norway].*





02.08.2012

Today we slept in. It was drizzling but we were nestled in a small part of paradise.

As the weather began to improve we packed up and headed off down to Myrdal about 16 kms away. There were a lot of extra waterfalls along the way but no more snow! The mist was covering a lot of the high spots and hanging over the lakes. The trail also was a lot rougher with larger stones so we took it pretty easy. Roel noticed about 2/3 of the way along that his front pannier had broken so we stopped and made a repair with wire, zip-ties and duct tape, which has been working pretty well since.

At Myrdal we had to jump on a train for a short 4 minute ride through a tunnel before joining the trail down to Voss. We were directed by a tourist board representative to board the train at the station for the 12.20 trip.

We loaded the bikes and ourselves and as we set off the conductor arrived to collect the fare. It was then that we found out that we had got on the express train to Bergen which only stopped at Voss. We explained to the conductor that we had no intention of riding the train to Voss but rather our bikes, and that we only had 17 kr available to pay for the trip to the other side of the tunnel. He replied that we should be on the local train and waived the fare due to the circumstances. We sat back and enjoyed the view and got a free train-ride down to Voss, but I still would have preferred to ride the bike down!

We are now at Voss and have been told that to purchase a Eurail Pass we need to go to Oslo...

We have also collected a complaints form to send to the Norwegian rail service. They are so full of misinformation that we can't trust anything they tell us now. We will probably look at training from Narvik to Oslo at the end of the Lofoten Islands part and sorting it all out there.

However the trip is going well and we still intend to continue north tomorrow after we sort a few things out with Roel's bike. It needed a new chain and rear brake pads.

03.08.2012

Voss to Vik

We got the bits sorted out with Roel's bike and decided to make a second trip into the library to connect to the Internet to try and catch up with the results for the rowers at the Olympics. It was good to get there to find that the men's double had just won and that we could hang around for the pair and Mahe in the single. Because we were in a library our excitement was fairly muted but several people did notice that we were very excited about the two live results. Another two gold medals, well done to our rowers!!

After that we began our ride over to Vik. This was a steady climb all afternoon until we were confronted by a Norwegian judder bar that took us about an hour to get up (986m).

We started at 75m so it was quite a good practice for what is ahead of us. We were back above the snow at the top and it was quite overcast but it had stopped raining in the afternoon. There were two tunnels to negotiate at the top of the climb which were quite noisy and dark.

We had an amazing descent for about 400 vertical meters and then we decided to free camp before getting into Vik.



04.08.2012

We woke to a dry tent for the first time in ages – usually it has been wet from overnight rain!

We headed off down the last 500 vertical meters to Vik in the hope we could get some fresh bread for breakfast but Norway doesn't appear to wake up until midday and we ended up opening up an emergency ration to keep us going. This was cooked down by the Sognefjord where a cruise ship was discharging its passengers on a day of activities. Quite an operation, as they all have to be transported in from the ship by lifeboats.

Today has been relatively flat and we are enjoying some dry weather for a change.

We had a short crossing of the Sognefjord by ferry and on the way across we saw lots of small dolphins. They were having a great time feeding and the flocks of birds were a good way to spot them. After we disembarked Roel had a go at fishing off the wharf but no luck there.

As we pedaled along the coast towards Sogndal we kept coming across the dolphins and it was quite amazing to be able to hear them coming up for air. It is so quiet here!

We had a couple more tunnels today but the old roads around the coast line have been kept open for bikes and pedestrians. We met up with a guy from England and had a short chat with him on one of these side roads. He is doing a similar route to us but is going to carry on through to Finland after going to the top.

We now are at Sogndal and will shortly be turning inland and climbing towards Lom along the 55 road.

I will post more images later as the cafe we are at is closing now.

05.08.2012

Sognefjell

After leaving the cafe in Sogndal we continued on to Solvorn and had hoped to be able to cross here on to a quiet road along the edge of the fjord but the last ferry had gone about 40 minutes before. We couldn't resist the temptation of this quaint seaside village to walk back up the road to the cafe and have a beer. This is the first alcohol we have had since reaching Norway – a real treat with some hot chips!

We have been living on a pretty tight budget here and each day we tend to eat the same sorts of things. Breakfast is usually muesli, banana and yoghurt. Milk is difficult to carry so it is quite a thick concoction. Lunch is coffee (from the billy) and some lomperes (potato pancakes – idea from Colin at Auckland Cycle Touring Association who did a trip here last year) with Nutella and banana in the form of a wrap or bread cut in thick slices with salami and cheese. Dinner has been mainly baked beans or chilly beans, hot dog sausages, tinned peas and instant mashed potato. Not the most flavoursome or attractive for that matter, but we have both ridden well each day on it.

We carry at all times two days worth of freeze dried meals for emergency supplies and replace these if they are used. We shop each day for supplies so we only carry the minimum amount of weight. On Saturday we have to buy two days worth of supplies as the shops are all shut here on Sundays.

I should point out that I have lost my “muffin” shape quite a bit so the diet is working in that respect as well!





Back to the action though.....after the beer we wandered down to the waterfront and cooked dinner on the wharf where Roel tried his hand at fishing. Very peaceful evening!

This morning we caught the first ferry crossing to Urnes where the oldest church is situated. It was a nasty 1km climb from the ferry to the church but it was a small wooden building beautifully preserved from the ancient times. More can be found on the website about the church.

After leaving Urnes we rode along the coast to Skjolden. The road was quiet and had little traffic, but it did include three tunnels. We had lights but during the ride in the second one (1km long) they were not strong enough to see with. The tunnels were very foggy so we ended up walking through and had one car pass us. Quite an experience! At the next one I got out my headlamp and attached it to the helmet so it was a lot easier to see although the fog is still a bit tricky.

We had lunch at Skjolden and then commenced the climb to the highest road in Norway would take us up to Jotunheimen National Park. We are heading to Lom so we have to climb to 1440 meters at the highest point. For those back home who are familiar with Fitzwilliam Drive by our place, it is a similar gradient (about 9%) for about 11km s and then it has a bit less gradient for the last 6km s.

All the way up the road it twisted and turned and we had the most amazing views back to where we had come from. We stopped regularly for photos (and recovery) but finally arrived at Turtagro after about 2.5 hours of constant uphill. We had an interesting chat with some people from USA who couldn't believe what we were up to. They wished us well as we took off up the hill again after a coffee break at the Turtagro Hotel.



Turtagro is the center for a lot of climbing activities and we could see the high peaks close by but they were still shrouded in mist most of the time. The weather today has been nice and dry after a wet start and looks good for the next couple of days – Hooray!!

Yesterday we covered 84km s and today we did 58km s with 1411 meters climbing. Now we are sleeping high in the mountains with just the sound of waterfalls

We do enjoy hearing how you all are at home so keep the comments coming.....

06.08.2012

On to Geiranger Fjord

We both were woken by the local sheep who had come down to where we were camping. It was a real pleasure to poke our heads out of the tent and find the local peaks were clear of clouds and that the day promised to be an absolute pearler! I had been particularly keen to ride this portion of the Sognefjell road in good weather conditions. I hope some of the images give you an idea of how majestic and huge this area is.

We still had to climb about 350 meters to get to the highest point and on the way up I took photos almost constantly. Every corner threw out another vista that cried out to be recorded.

We had snow in patches all around us and the glaciers were clearly visible high on the mountains. Some of the lakes had thin ice visible early in the day.

The Sognefjell road is the highest one in Norway and a popular tourist route. We expected a lot more traffic on it but were surprised at how few cars we came across.

The downhill was a short steep drop to get us to the river we would be following to Lom. The views were also nice once we got down below the snow and changed to more rural views with several farms with cattle.

We covered 66 kms and are settled in Lom for the night. It is amazing how the weather is treating us as we are back to rain again!! Not too much of a problem for us as we have







had two tough days of climbing and will be in bed early tonight. We continue to try and update the blog regularly and Roel is keeping up to date with the Olympics as much as we can.

07.08.2012

Today it is wet again and we have had a slow start. It is a good occasion to get all the clothes washed and dried at the camping ground. Our plan today is to get to Grotli which is about 70km s along the road to Geiranger. It has all been a steady climb following the Otta River, and a nice change from the dramatic up-hills of the last two days. Having said that by the time we got to Grotli we had reached 1000m again and the weather was starting to turn back to rain. It had dried out while we were doing most of the riding.

At Grotli we had dinner (Hamburgers – a treat!) at the hotel there. It was a museum of all sorts of nick-nacks. Among the collectibles they had a complete set of the Olympic pins from the Lillhammer winter Olympics. There were heaps of dining rooms in the place which seemed a bit over the top when there didn't appear to be any guests!

On the walls and outside they had information and props from a movie 'Into the White' (re-titled Cross of Honour) shot last year about a war time incident between German and English aircraft and how both crews ended up in valleys close by and how they survived after crashing. The German plane used as a prop is outside the hotel.

Once the rain had stopped we headed up the road a bit and found a nice sheltered spot to settle for the night.



08.08.2012

Wet road to Kristiansund

This morning it is still drizzly and very overcast. It is also the coldest start we have had. We still had a bit of climbing to do although it is not steep and we have got up above the snow again.

At Dalsnibba I saw my first reindeer! It was grazing beside the road totally content to ignore about 3 bus loads of people that hung around to photograph it. We got to the top of the pass and began a 14km (steep 8-10 percent) twisting descent to sea-level at Geiranger. Riding the bikes down allowed us to stop at will to take photos (although it is very misty up here) and the buses and cars really can't stop as the road is narrow. Awesome!

The mist cleared just as we got to about two thirds the way down and we got this view of the Geiranger Fjord. Later it misted over again and rained in the afternoon.

We hope to be able to board the ferry here to Molde but there is no wharf so we hope they will allow us to go on the tender with the gear.

We are both going well and having a great trip!

Continuation from the Geiranger report....

Roel and I are now cruising down the fjord from Geiranger to Molde. There were no problems with boarding the bikes and so we are sitting back in the warmth of the ship "Nordkapp". The weather here is cold, about 10 degrees, so we didn't fancy another high climb.

We have had a chance to catch up with news from home briefly and it sounds like New Zealand is blowing its top a bit. White Island has had a poof and now Tongariro!! For those in the regions of activity make sure you stay safe.

Plenty of water above and below! This is one of numerous waterfalls on the way down the fjord. The image also gives you an idea of how steeply the land rises from sea-level. These



ridges are about 900 - 1200 meters high.

The trip on the ship included a dinner so we cashed in on that one! Mind you we looked like a couple of "Jack Dawson's" ("Titanic") sitting in the restaurant in our cycling gear! We sat at a table with two Norwegian ladies that we chatted with. They had boarded the ship in Bergen and were leaving it in Kristiansund (I think) so they would probably have had a wet trip all the way. Such a shame, as these trips are not cheap even for the locals.

It was a nice break and Roel and I had a chance to watch a bit of the Olympics for a change and be warm and sheltered from the persistent rain. It was a nice introduction to cruising by ship but I prefer the bike when it is dry. There is a lot of sitting around which we would both find hard to cope with over a period longer than a day I think.

We got to Molde where we got off at 9.30pm. We finally found a suitable campsite at about 11pm and settled down for the night. It was a lot warmer now we had got to the coast and out of the high mountains.

09.08.2012

We have got up a little later than usual due to the late night looking for a campsite last night. It is still raining, so not many pics I'm afraid. The landscape is still very dramatic but not as high as the last week.

We are heading to Kristiansund and have crossed a new bridge on the way just before Averoya. It was a short, steep, up and over style which gave us a glimpse of the coastal landscape. All the rocks



along the coast here are very worn and rounded from glacial activity in the past. There are lots of small inlets and islands everywhere. During our crossing of the curvy bridge we passed a bundle of people fishing from the bridge just before. They were catching mackerel.

Ok it is now 9.30pm and we have finally given in to the weather and splashed out on a cheap hotel room - \$220 New Zealand dollars! We get a free breakfast with it as well!

By the time we left the cafe in Averoya we still had 17 kms to go to get to Kristiansund and it was raining persistently. We have good wet weather gear but you still feel damp under it and it is only 12 degrees here. We stopped to fill water bottles at a gas station and got told we would not be able to go through the undersea tunnel and that the ferry marked on our map no longer runs. This could mean a back track of about 100 kms if we are not able to get a lift. At the toll station we were told we could get on the local bus that would be passing through at 6.50 (this was at 6.15), so we got out the tomato soup and tin of peas and heated those up in the tiny bus stop by the toll station. We must have looked the most pathetic sight!

The bus arrived right on time and we clambered aboard with all the gear and drove into the tunnel. Thank heavens we were not allowed to cycle in it. It is 6 kms long and drops down at a 10 percent gradient (good for the first part) but at half way it then climbs at the same gradient back up again. That would have been a mother of a climb! The inside was well lit but in the uphill end it looked very fummy and it is obvious that the longer tunnels are a health issue if we use them. At this stage we have no other tunnels to go through that do not have an alternate route, either by ferry or old roads.

But now we are warm, dry and sitting in our tiny room watching the Olympics!

10.08.2012

On the move again towards Trondheim

Today the weather is forecast to be raining again so we have moved from the hotel room (which you couldn't swing a kiwi in) to a cabin – which is also cheaper – and sleeps 4.



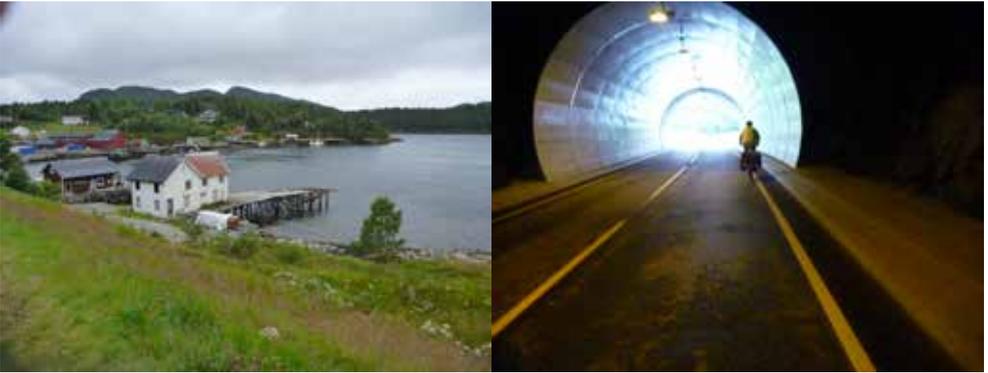


We had a bit of fun in the hotel room before we left it..... We both had nice hot showers before going down to the breakfast and shortly after the fire alarms started ringing intermittently. No one seemed to be particularly concerned but those of us in the cafe were getting sick of the noise. About 15 minutes later the fire brigade arrived and wandered around, turned the noise off and left. Then one of the cleaners came over to tell us we had triggered it with the hot showers. Obviously when they entered the room to check it they didn't detect smoke and the heater was off, so it had to be the shower?

We moved all the gear to a cabin and had a wander around the town center. It is mainly a shipping port. We found an old lookout that gave us views all around although it was pretty limited with the clouds. We needed to get something for dinner at the same time and just spent a bit of time relaxing and checking the bikes over in the afternoon.

11.08.2012

We got away at a reasonable hour this morning keen to be back on the bikes after a good days rest yesterday. Today we are following the coastal islands towards Trondheim. The islands are all quite worn looking rocks which have been eroded during the ice-ages. They



have a very different look to them than the fractured fjords. There are scattered houses and settlements along this coast road which appear to be fishing villages. The road we are travelling appears to be quite new and so where we expected ferries to be, there are now bridges or tunnels.

12.08.2012

Hitching on the Hurtigruten

We ended up completing 81 kms yesterday by the time we found a spot to set up camp. We got up early and continued to climb a hill that we had not quite finished yesterday. The mountains were covered in mist early on and as we descended to sea-level the fog cleared. The day then brightened up and we had cloudless skies. It made the riding so much more pleasant and by the time we had reached the end of the days riding we had covered 89 kms. There was 1100 meters climbing up and down hills as the road undulated around the coast. One minute we were at sea level and the next we had climbed to the top of some cliffs!

At the camping ground we stayed at for the night we treated ourselves to a beer for the second time and sat out on a balcony enjoying the sun until late in the evening.





13.08.2012

We had a nice flat 35 km ride around the coast this morning before turning inland to Trondheim where we have hitched a lift to Rorvik on the Hurtigruten ferry. We are travelling along the old E39 main road that has now been replaced with a new road with many tunnels that don't have cycle access. It is good in a way as the road we are on is very quiet and peaceful with very few cars. It is another stunner of a day and I'm afraid the reports are short because I want to go on deck to enjoy the trip. We have 8 hours travel up the coast and then we will be back on the bikes.

Trondheim is a large city with a several universities. It was at one stage the capital of Norway so there are quite a few large old buildings, and in the middle of the older part of the city there is a large church. We had a bit of time to sit beside the river and have coffee before heading off to find the ferry. There is a large number of tourists visiting the city and so it was a pretty busy and bustling place. The center of the city is a pedestrian only area that had a small market. Trondheim was nice to visit and quite different to the smaller villages we are accustomed to.

As we travel along the coast the fog has descended and so views from the ferry are very "white". With any luck we will pass through this and see a bit more as we head north but it does give me time to catch up with the blog.

Now the fog has lifted and we have been able to enter some very tight routes through between islands and passing under a bridge. The scenery is incredible and the rocky islands are quite rounded from glacial activity. There are small communities dotted along this barren coast which appear to be all involved in fishing. There is lots of aqua culture taking place here which could be salmon farming as we can see the fish leaping around inside some of the pens.

It won't be long before we will be disembarking at Rorvik and then seeking a place to put the tent up. There is plenty of daylight left here as it never really gets dark now.





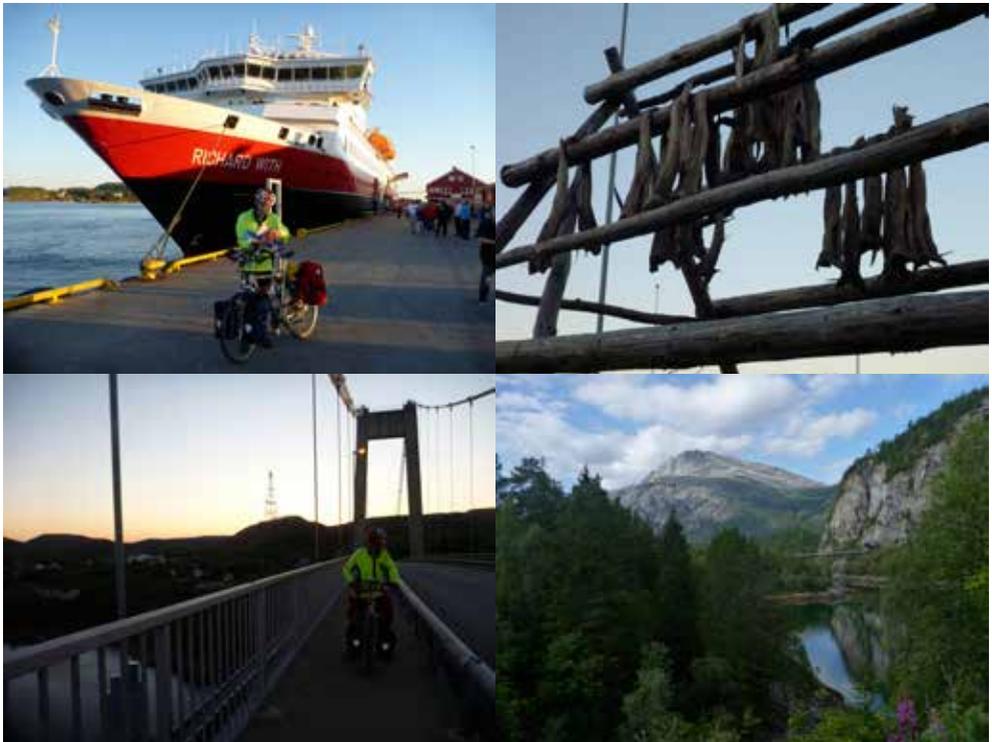
14.08.2012

Flat out along the coast...

We got off the ferry at Rorvik and had a quick look around this small fishing town. One of the factories had a fish drying rack set up for the tourists with a few cod hanging from it. This is a traditional way the Norwegians have preserved the fish for use later (also called stockfish). I can imagine that these villages would be the smelliest places around at certain times in the year! We also rode through the center and came across a threesome, who were playing a bit of jazz music. The Hurtigruten ferries going north and south come together at Rorvik each evening at 8.30 so there are usually plenty of tourists around. We never seem to see too many locals!

We headed out of town over the high bridge and caught a bit of the sun going down. A spectacular view to see the mountaintops in sunlight while the sun had set at the end of a great day.

We camped just off the side of the road not far from the bridge. During the night I heard a bit of activity around the tent and some odd noises which in the morning could have indicated a moose had passed by us. There were some rather large "cow" like tracks very near the tent!



We decided to take a northerly route on some quieter roads which proved to be very hilly. Great views and a sunny day but pretty tiring all the same. When we got to a place on the map called Saltbotn it must have disappeared as there was nothing there. We had hoped to get coffee and a snack! It seems that some of the Norwegian spelling of place names does not always have consistency from signs to maps. Signs indicate places that are not on the maps, and the maps have places that are not signposted. Today we headed off down a road that we thought was taking us to one place and it turned out to be a dead end. Lucky a local alerted us to this before we had cycled miles only to have to come back!

After deciding to take the local advice and stay on Route 770, we followed the Folda Fjord until Foldereid and then turned north where we camped at Arsand. This was a wayside picnic spot where we found a flat patch out of sight of passing traffic. A bit cheeky, but a good spot.

One of the problems we had during the day was obtaining drinking water. In both instances when we asked people if they had spare supplies we were given a bottle. First from a German couple heading off to do a day fishing, and secondly from a couple in a campervan from Italy. We are very grateful to these people! 82 kms on the clock for today.



15.08.2012

We have woken to a foggy morning but the previous days have had fog at some stage and when it has lifted it has been glorious blue sky and sun. It was a late start, we didn't get on the road until after 9 am, and we have just tootled along at a very cruisey pace. Roel has had a niggle in his right leg and so today we took it very easy. The terrain was about as flat as you can get in Norway today! We have come on to the scenic part of the route 17 and it is all along the coast of several islands. This means we will be crossing from one to the other on ferries.

When we reached Holm we had a bit of time to fill in until the next ferry arrived so Roel tried a bit of fishing. He has broken the reel so the only thing he has is the nylon line on a tiny spool and the trolling lure. He has been "jigging" off the end of the wharf and caught 4 fish of various species (but all small) and not one was hooked in the mouth! He had a lot of fun though and provided a bit of entertainment.



We have continued up the coast and are staying at a camping ground beside a beach at Vik (sounds familiar?) which is a nature area. We had a nice chat to the owner about birds and wildlife around the place and he has advised us to go out on the bikes at about 9 pm tonight as there are quite a few moose in the area.

A shorter day on the road with only 62 kms covered.....mind you we still have to go on our moose hunt!

16.08.2012

Along the coast with 14,000 islands

We are still traveling along the coast where it is nice and flat. It is still very foggy but Roel and I have seen our first moose. It was next to the forest beside a paddock and it trotted off when it spied us watching it. It is an unfortunate looking animal with a gait to match! *[Roel: I think these Elks - which is what they are called here - look quite impressive. This one did not have antlers, so probably was female] Also they are very big.... (Sorry: too far away and too foggy to get a picture).*

The area we are moving through now is the primary milk producing area in Norway. There are many farms which are running dairy cows and they are all cutting the grass in the





paddocks and baling it for us in the winter. It looks like they get two rounds of hay making per year to feed the stock that live indoors over winter.

This coast road involves quite a bit of island hopping and there are plenty of ferries that move vehicles and people frequently from one to the other. Most of the time we just turn up and wait until the next one shows up. As we headed for our final ferry for the day at Horn we had to pass through Bronnysund. Along the road there were three old marker stones that indicated the distance to go.

As we waited for the ferry at Horn we met up with Olivia from Spain who has travelled from France on her bike. We had a nice chat and when we got off the ferry we headed off to find a place to spend the night together. We thought we had found a spot and decided to ask the farmer if it was ok to camp there. He suggested we went back down the road to a timber factory and camp by the water in front of the building. When we got there we found a nicely set up camping spot and shortly after the factory owner turned up with some fire wood for the fire pit.

A Dutch couple turned up in a campervan and by the time sunset came around we had a fire going, marshmallows cooking and great conversation. At about 12 the sun finally dipped down below the horizon and we called it a night.

We had ridden 110 kms during a beautiful fine day which had started quite foggy but that had burned off by the afternoon.

17.08.2012

We woke this morning to a clear fine day but it wasn't that long before the fog was rolling in again. We packed up and headed for the next ferry at Vevelstad. This took us along the bottom of the seven sisters range of peaks. They are sort of like a mini version of the Remarkables in Queenstown. They also had pockets of fog about them but eventually we got a few nice images.

During the crossing to Tjotta we met up with a German couple heading our way as well. We all sat down and compared routes we are planning to take. It appears we are all heading the same way and would all be getting on the ferry at Nesna to go to Bodo. After crossing to Tjotta on the ferry the Germans headed off but Olivia came along with us. We rode past a war memorial that is the gravesite for 10,000 men who died during the war. Mainly from Norway, Russia and Germany. 1100 of these men (Russians) were killed when the allies sunk the prisoner of war ship they were on. Quite a sad place, but a beautiful spot among this archipelago of around 14,000 islands.

We continued up the coast to Sandnessjoen where we had to cross the elaborate bridge there. It didn't have a cycle lane but it wasn't all that busy. It is a narrow two lane construction that climbs quite high above the fjord. It was a bit windy so it made for a rather nervous crossing.

We then had the last ferry to catch for the day that would take us to Nesna. We had a bit of time to fill in there so Roel had his fishing gear out and was catching more small fish. All got thrown back but it kept him entertained! We met up with the Germans again and decided to camp at the local camping ground very near the ferry pier. We had an early departure – 5.30 am so we figured it best to be close to the wharf.

By days end we had clocked up another 100 kms. They are good miles but it is pretty flat along this part. The decision to jump on the ferry is probably a good one as there are several nasty tunnels between Nesna and Ornes which locals were saying also has some very steep hills. From Bodo we go to the Lofoten Islands.



18.08.2012

Today we had our early start and boarded the "Lofoten" at Nesna. "Lofoten" is one of the older ships in the Hurtigruten fleet built in 1963. She chugs along like an old steamer and has a nice character about her. We could hear the engines throbbing along as she came

through the fog to the wharf early in the morning. It is getting a lot colder up here now with temperatures around the 13 degrees. We have just crossed the Arctic Circle which is marked by a beacon on the island of Viking - a small worn piece of rock in the ocean.

Lofoten Islands

After arriving in Bodo we parted ways with Olivia and the two Germans. They were all carrying on to Stamsund, about half way along the Lofoten Islands.

We had a bite to eat and uploaded the previous blog entry before heading east to Salstraumen, where there is the strongest tidal current in the world. The strait between the Skjerstad Fjord and the Salten Fjord is 3 kms long and turns into a maelstrom every six hours as the water balances from one fjord to the other. The current reaches speeds of up to 20 knots and creates a series of massive whirl pools and eddies. It steadily builds up and then recedes before repeating again in the opposite direction six hours later. It is a paradise for the fish and sea birds to feed in so it is also popular with the fishermen. It was interesting watching a couple of boats going in and out of the current while trying to hook the big one!

We are staying at a camping ground very near to this and will head back to Bodo in the morning to catch the ferry to Moskenes tomorrow at 11am.

Long day with short kms on the bike. We only did the 35 kms to the camping.



19.08.2012

We had a good night's sleep and were on our way back to Bodo for the 11.15 ferry to Moskenes. The previous day had been a tiring one but the return trip to Bodo went nice and easily. The ferry was a four hour trip across the open sea but we could see the peaks of the Lofoten Islands quite easily in the distance. As we got closer to Moskenes we could understand why this is one of the most scenic areas in Norway. These great peaks just poke straight up out of the sea. Much like the Remarkables back home in Queenstown.



After exiting the ferry we turned left and headed to a place called A. It is also the end of the E10 road. There was a lovely fishing village museum there which we decided to have a guided tour through. Veronica gave us all the spiel about how the fishermen worked with the cod and how the drying of the cod was established with the humidity and sun during the summer and the development of the extraction of the cod liver oil that was traditionally used in everything there.



It was a very interesting excursion for us. The drying racks are mostly empty now as the dried cod has been exported or stored after completing the drying process. It still has a very fishy odour about the place. Everywhere on the islands you see these drying racks.



Many of the small fisherman's huts are now converted into up-market accommodation for tourists. It appears that the area is becoming more of a tourist spot than a full-on fishing center, largely in part to the fact the resource has been over-fished in the past. It is nice to see an area keep the traditions going though.



We had our dinner on the wharf by one of

the restaurants that had now closed for the summer season. It was a shame it wasn't open as plenty of people came to it while we were there looking for a meal! It seems that a lot of the tourist activities are starting to shut down now. It only really affects us when we need ferries. The local Info center told us that we should take the ferry around one of the undersea tunnels as it was quite steep to come up out of. So we took the advice on board for later.

After dinner we found a nice spot to camp overlooking the sea on the old road that has been replaced by a tunnel out of Moskenes. It is a really nice warm evening but heaps of midgees!

We clocked up 57 kms altogether today.



20.08.2012

I woke early and caught the glow of pink from the sunrise but then decided a sleep in was in order. We did get on the road at a reasonable hour and our target for the day is Leknes. The vistas are slowing our progress as we turn every corner more photos need to be taken! The road is fairly flat around the coast and we have several bridges to cross as we move from one island to the next.



The Info Center had suggested that we go to Nusfjord to catch the ferry to Ballstad which would mean we dodge the Nappstraumen Tunnel. It was a side road over a saddle of 6 kms to a fishing village. It was a nice place. It had a general store that was built in 1916 and has been kept in the original condition with old stuff everywhere. It reminded us of the stop we had on the Otago Rail Trail which I think was at Oturehua.

At this point we also found out that the ferry no longer went – the last trip was on the 15th – oops!

We had a coffee at the cafe there and the girls there said the ferry had gone today but sails at 12 and we need to book it now. We decided not to wait for the trip tomorrow but to carry on through the tunnel. It has a path for cycles but the tunnels are not nice places and we weren't looking forward to it. As it happens it was not so bad but trucks are incredibly noisy inside tunnels!

When we popped out we were close to Leknes where we got food for dinner. We then climbed another hill and are now settling down for the night in a wayside park overlooking the town. The weather has been great today with a bit of fog covering the mountains, but it is forecast to turn to rain for the next 4 days.

Weather forecasting is pretty accurate here. Apparently a dried King Cod was hung from the ceilings of the houses of fishermen and used as a method to forecast the wind direction in the old days. It was interesting to note that during the guided tour there were two hanging in one house so I asked Veronica which one was right as they pointed in different directions. It seems that method involves an element of randomness I think. My arthritic knees are a better indicator – no pain if it's going to be fine, if the right one only is sore it is changeable, if both are uncomfortable stay in the tent it's going to be wet!

We saw our first White Tailed Sea Eagles today. Two of them had taken off and were soaring upwards into the higher winds. Truly magnificent birds. We watched them until they were too high to see and moved on.

While we were in Leknes at the info site we came across two German guys with bikes loaded up. They had actually caught the bus from Svolvær and were looking to bus from



Leknes to Moskenes. We couldn't believe it! Apparently they thought it was too hilly. I told them it was really quite flat and that they should ride. When we checked the GPS we had covered 83km s today with 1100 meters of climbing – not quite as flat as we thought!



21.08.2012

We have had the odd spit overnight and this morning it was drizzling as we packed up and set off. We have decided to take the coast road all the way round to Svolvær. It means we don't come across too many places but the roads have a lot less traffic on them. The mountains are shrouded in cloud but the harbours are clear as we pass through various clusters of fishing houses and harbours.

We arrived at Stamsund and had a short explore around there. The township is a stopping point for the Hurtigruten ferry and seemed to be quite a bit bigger than it looked as we approached it.

We stopped for a coffee at Gimsoystrambua which gave us a break from the rain. But we were very soon wet again as we continued our way around the coast. We had a couple of tunnels to pass through again today and once we had got to Svolvær we talked with the Info Center people about the options for getting to Narvik. We need to avoid another undersea tunnel so we will be heading for Fiskebol and taking a ferry to Melbu.

Although today has been wet for a time this evening it is dry while we put the tent up and the weather tomorrow should be improving and then be fine on Friday.



We covered another 95 kms for the day. Despite the rain today, we still enjoyed the scenery, which is still magnificent here. At some stage we were getting a nice tail wind and agreed, that it was another flavour of cycling in paradise - a bit colder, but still making all the effort and hardship worthwhile. Yes, we know, we are mad!

22.08.2012

Langoya Island

The day has dawned dry again but still a bit overcast although the peaks are visible. We are headed north to Fiskebol, about 35 kms away to catch the ferry to Melbu. This means we are able to go around the undersea tunnel just east of Fiskebol. As we rode up here the weather turned to rain and there is a lot of low cloud and fog covering the peaks. We were pretty cold as the temperatures had dropped to below 10 degrees and we were riding into a head wind. Our wet weather gear is good but our faces were getting the rain mostly.

The ferry was nice and warm and dry but soon enough we were off it and back in the rain. We found a veranda with a seat to have lunch at Melbu. We moved the seat over the top of the air conditioning outflow so we had a bit of warm air around at least our feet. We were across the road from a posh cafe so we must have looked rather pathetic on our park bench!

We passed through Stokmarknes which is the home of the Hurtigruten Ferry just as one of the ferries was pulling in.....any excuse to blow it's horn! They have a museum there but we didn't bother going in as heaps of people from the ship appeared and we were more keen to keep moving with the cold. There was another high bridge to cross here onto Langoya Island.

Our target for the day was to get as far as Sortland which we did but this island is very flat and has a lot of communities that farm along the main road so free camping was out of the question. We have only one option for a camping ground at Sortland Camping and Hotel and they charge like wounded bulls for facilities that are not nearly as good as other ones we have stayed at. A Dutch couple we have talked with agreed so I have advised the check-in lady that they need to make sure they put loo-paper and soap into the toilet

block..... we wait and see!

Today we covered another 83 kms and while I am writing this Roel is working out the best way back on the trains. So far it looks like we will be riding into Sweden just north of Narvik and using a 3 country Eurail Pass to get to the Germany/Netherlands border and then riding to Amsterdam.



23.08.2012

68 degrees north and cold!

The weather forecast was for a nice and sunny day and indeed it was. There were some clouds and at some stage we felt a light drizzle and could see snow falling on the mountain tops with the icing sugar effect, but there was a lot of sunshine. Nevertheless it was the coldest day so far and the thermometer did not get far above 7 degrees. So, we were still riding with three or four layers including over-pants, rain jackets and gloves. Perhaps we left it a bit late in the season to be above the polar circle. We reached Harstad today, which is 68+ degrees above the equator. The schools have started again in Norway and we have been told, that if we wanted to go further north or see the midnight sun, we should have been here in July. And indeed, we have made the decision already, that this is our northern-most point.

We stayed at the campground in Sortland and left from there with a nice downhill to the township itself. But then we immediately had to cross one of the largest bridges we have crossed so far, so we had a decent warm-up. We turned south along the main highway 85 until we had an opportunity to get away from the traffic and to avoid a large tunnel.



The tunnels here are quite frightening, because they can be lengthy, steep and have little ventilation to control the fumes. But mainly the noise from the traffic can be deafening and often you are worried that some big truck is coming up behind you, while it is just the concentrated noise of a small engine car. Let alone several of those coming from both directions.

The (for Norwegian standards little) Sigerfjord was very scenic with the typical old-style Norwegian houses. But today it was particularly beautiful, because the wind-still day provided fantastic reflections on the clear water, whereas the bottom showed a variety of colours from seaweed, rocks and sand. We have seen quite a few sandy beaches in the last few days, but no swimmers or sun-bathers, although people do go diving here.



We did feel sorry for the motorists in the tunnel who missed this scenery, but further on we had to join up with them again to continue along a nice lake, where we could not take our preferred old-road route on the far side, because it was still on our map, but had since been reverted back to shrub and farmland. After a quick unsuccessful attempt to fish a 'keeper' from the ferry-wharf we had a cup of coffee and then crossed the next fjord. Today we could see the tops of the mountains clearly, which were still as steep and rugged as in the south part the Lofoten. Here, however they are not as close together, so the postcard pictures are a little bit further apart. Therefore we made better progress with riding and by lunchtime we had made much better progress than expected and already passed Vik, where we originally planned to camp. So we decided to move on to Harstad to try and sort out our return trip. We had to climb another 200 meters before getting there and that may not seem much, but at the moment we are taking turns with feeling the effects of 4000 kilometer at an average of 80 km per day.

We arrived at Harstad at ten to three and expected, that the Information kiosk where we needed help may be closed by 3 pm. Fortunately they actually close at 3.30 and we just happened to ask someone the way who was prepared to walk with us to the tourist office. He then wanted to take our pictures and started to interview us about our tour so far and how we got to Harstad. It turned out we had made contact with a reporter from the local paper and he kept interviewing us in the tourist office, while we were trying to sort out our return trip. We did manage to book a Eurail pass for 5 days through 3 countries (Sweden, Denmark and Gemany) by 3.35 and have the confirmation printed at the office. The lady who was keen to close the shop forgot to charge us for the Internet and printer use, so hopefully all is well. The plan is to do two days of train riding back through Sweden (a nine-hour and an 18-hour train ride) with a day off in between. Yes, Sweden is a big country and we have come a long way up north. Then we can cross Denmark and Germany in about 8 hours and perhaps call in at some friends on the way before getting back to Amsterdam for some rest and relaxation. We hope this plan does not fail, because the paperwork for it will be sent to Amsterdam (assuming that we do not start the journey for another week) and we have no idea whether we can actually take the bikes with the Eurail-pass as well.

Anyway, we still have two days of riding before we get to Sweden and the forecast is for more rain. But there is light at the end of the tunnel and we are enjoying a good camp site just south of Harstad. We are starting to feel with some sadness, that the fairy tale in Norway might be coming to an end soon. But, it probably has been enough and there are many unforgettable memories.

For the record: 78 kilometers today.

24.08.2012

Going south

Today we have started off in the wet again and the temperatures are really cold. We had the wind in our faces to start with but as we shifted direction to the east again we got a bit of relief from the "icicles in the face" when the wind came from behind us.

We had a long bridge to cross again this morning but the nice part was a cafe on the other side where we took some shelter. A German tourist bus was preparing to leave and we both offered to swap seats with some of the passengers. No surprise.... no one took up the offer.

After taking this break the weather looked a little brighter in the direction we were heading so we departed in a light drizzle along the coastal side route. The more we continued on the less rain we had which allowed us to stop at a small village for lunch. We originally found a picnic table at the school that we thought would serve the purpose well but then realised that the school would also have their lunch break too and we would end up with all the kids around us so we shifted to the wharf. It was a bit exposed to the wind but we found a sheltered corner to boil the billy. When the school had their lunch break, it turned out, that they only had about 10 students there.

While the weather had dried out we decided to continue on towards Narvik. We were both riding well and felt it was a good idea to get as far as we could while it was dry.

We had to join up with the main road again and ride with a bit more traffic and to descend a tunnel to get to the camping site for the night. As we circled around the Ofotfjord adjacent to Narvik we came past a memorial to the WW2 Battle of Narvik. The Germans had seen Narvik as a valuable site to set up their defences and after a prolonged attack the allies were able to liberate the town. There were lots of casualties. There are several large panels in the area that describe what happened in several languages.

By the time we reached the overnight camp we had covered 110 km.

Not bad considering the terrain we are riding in!



25.08.2012

This will be our last day in Norway. We have 27kms to ride to the Swedish border which is uphill to Riksgrensen. The train departs there at 10am so we got away early as we had no idea how far we had to climb and we are pretty slow going uphill. As it was we arrived at Riksgrensen shortly after 9 am and decided to check the departure at the station before making a coffee. Just as well we checked as the train was to be replaced by a bus! This was the start of a rather 'seat of the pants' day.



Most of this place was shut for their (normally winter) season. We finally found a hostel with someone in it who told us that yes, there was a bus, but no they don't take bikes. In fact she told us that as a matter of course you can't take the bike on a train in Sweden. Roel rang the train company in Stockholm and they told us that the bikes had to be in bags to go on the trains so we will have to pack them up.

At 10 am we wandered down to the bus stop and the driver agreed to take us as far as he could with the bikes but we would have to get off if he needed the space for luggage from other passengers. We agreed with that and he got us to Kiruna, about 130 kms down the road. There were heaps of people waiting here so the driver ordered another bus to come. As Roel and I made coffee in the train station this other bus turned up for the 2.30 pm run to Gallyvarre. He offered to take us as his bus was not so full. Things are going well! We got in to Gallyvarre and noticed the over night train to Stockholm was departing at 7.30pm which gave us 2 hours to pack the bikes into bags we didn't have.

The hotel across from the train station kindly gave us some rubbish bags (the train company didn't specify what type of bags the bikes had to be in) and we got some duct tape from the service station. Back on platform 3 we dismantled the bikes and eventually packed them into the tarp we have been using as a ground sheet under the tent.

During this procedure we had a bit of an audience, because people that know weren't so sure we would get away with this. When the train turned up we threw on our bikes and 9 separate bags and clambered aboard. Whew!!



So now we were on our way to Stockholm. We had to sort of repeat the performance of shifting all the gear to another train at Boden which was a mad dash across a platform this time. The conductor checked our pass and noted we didn't have a reservation so he wished us good luck and handed the pass back. We are not too sure why he wished us good luck but we haven't been kicked off yet.

Once we get to Stockholm we will decide how to continue from there. It sounds very messy and to a certain degree it is, but Roel and I think of it as just one of those things you have to deal with in adventure racing sometimes and it just seems to sort itself out. Now the bikes are packaged we will continue non-stop to the Germany – Netherlands border and reassemble them to ride the last part across Holland.

Sweden has hundreds of flattish miles covered with lovely lakes and 'Christmas' trees.

Sweden is very flat compared with Norway. Once we crossed the border it just sort of gradually flattened out and is just wilderness with nothing but pine type trees. As we have got further south the towns have got bigger and there are more of them. It is odd covering the same distance in 24 hours that we have spent the last 4 weeks pedaling!

27.08.2012

Back in the flat land....

We have kind of jumped a few days. Life on the road home has been hectic to say the least. Our experiences with adventure racing has got us through this stage intact!

We had got ourselves to Stockholm and decided we could make a connection to Copenhagen so we shuffled the gear across platforms and boarded the train. We popped ourselves into some seats and managed to explain our somewhat dubious Eurail pass to the conductor who wished us luck on the rest of our travels.

After Getting to Kopenhagen we decided to see if we could stay the night at a hotel before carrying on the next day. Roel headed off in search of a suitable place that would also be able to pick us up and transport all the gear. No luck there! The next option was to find out when we could next get on a train going in the direction we needed to go.

There happened to be one at 10.15 pm to Nykobing down close to the ferry crossing from Denmark to Germany. So off we went shuttling the gear to the next platform..... you need to know this involved moving it about 50 meters at a time so that we did not appear to abandon any of it otherwise security people would get suspicious about unattended bags. Each change of platform, if we didn't find a trolley, took about six goes!

We arrived at Nykobing quite late at 11.30 and decided we may have to sleep at the train station. There were some people working in a new cafe at the station and they offered to take care of the gear until morning and advised us of a hotel about 800 meters away. So we took the valubles and headed off walking to find this hotel. There was a night receptionist and we finally got to a horizontal position at about 12.30. The next day we would need to be at the train station to get the gear and depart at 9.15.

We had a breakfast included with the room tariff and after a good feed we headed back on foot to the station. We met the guy who was building the cafe and collected our gear. We have got pretty good at getting the bikes and bags on the trains and soon were seated in first class on the ICE (high-speed train) to Germany. There were warnings everywhere that this train didn't take bikes but I think we moved so fast that the conductor had no



idea how many bags were ours or what was in them. At the ferry the crew changed from Denmark people to German staff. They too raised their eyebrows about our ticket but accepted it all the same. The ICE train took us to Hamburg and there we could catch the train to Osnabruck. It was supposed to be from the same platform but we ended up moving the gear from Platform 2 to 14. Roel found a trolley thing from some catering outfit and we loaded that up. I hope the caterers found the trolley eventually!

After arriving in Osnabruck we could get a local train to Bad Bentheim which is on the German side of the border. We then assembled the bikes on the platform so we could ride from there to Amsterdam. It was rather ironic that one of the departing train conductors got Roel to move his bike from some moveable steps as they were required for the train departing to Amsterdam.

We rode from the train station at about 5 pm and crossed into Holland not long after. We had a nice meal at a restaurant before riding off to find a campsite for the night. I had read about some nature camping sites and so when we came past a direction to one of these we decided to see if we could pitch the tent there. When we got to it there were three paddocks with caravans and tents. Not quite what I thought we would find but we set up camp and settled down for the night. Apparently we needed some nature camping card (which we didn't have) but we left early in the morning so I guess it didn't really matter.



28.08.2012

Today we got on the road early and had breakfast after purchasing yoghurt at a small village cheese shop. We planned to visit Roel's cousin Karel and Anja later in the day but we had a good distance to cover to get to Zutphen.

We had to backtrack about 5 km because the camping was much further away from our route than we had thought. We had breakfast in Oldenzaal at a town square with our usual combination of yoghurt and muesli. We were running low on water, so we called in at the local pharmacy who looked a bit strange at the request, but when we explained that on our type of trip you can't always find the public toilets and other necessary conveniences of life.

Generally people are quite interested in what we have done. For example we had lunch at a nice terrace overlooking a watermill with three paddlewheels driving two mills, dating from 1548 (!). The people on the next table asked how far we had come and almost choked on their lunch at the answer: about 4000 km. We had to explain and they were even more surprised to hear about the electronic equipment we are carrying: two laptops, GPS, two cameras etc. So we got to talk about modern technology. We had been baffled by seeing a robot-mower for the first time. This relatively small Husquarna (sewing mowing machine?) was quietly mowing away in straight lines on an oddly shaped lawn, which looked cleanly mown anyway. When it bumped into a hedge or onto the driveway it would back away a little and turn itself about 30 degrees and carry on. Fascinating.



We assumed it was quite expensive. The guy on the next table guessed it was about 500 Euros. It turned out, that the waitress who had served us actually lived at the house. She revealed, that the actual price was 2000 Euros (about New Zealand\$3500) and that it operated 24/7 and reloaded itself when the battery was flat. Unbelievable and the lawn was relatively small. I know lots of people (including myself) who would be happy to do the mowing job on that size lawn for a few years for that kind of money.

Zutphen is on the IJssel River and Karel has a house that overlooks the river and which has been in the family for many generations. It is a huge house which has undergone several rebuilds including one after WW2 when the Germans had occupied it. They invited us to have dinner and stay the night which gave us time to have a really good catch up with all

the things our families are up to. A great night of fun together and a highlight on our trip for both Roel and I.

29.08.2012

We left Karel and Anja at midday after a nice sleep in and a super breakfast. We are travelling through a scenic route over the national parks to get to Amsterdam. These are often wide open areas of heather which is now flowering so Holland looks like it has a purple carpet laid over it. If the countryside is not heather we are in some really nice forest patches.

We had a couple of ferry crossings too which are a lot smaller than the ones in Norway. Today the weather has been sunny and warm so there were lots of people out on bikes touring through the parks. We had a coffee stop at Bronckhorst which is an old village with a focus on Charles Dickens. The cafe was a good opportunity to have my regular coffee and appletart!

We have now got to a camping ground just out of Arnhem and are having a beer while we type this up!



30.08.2012

We have continued on along the scenic bike route and are camped between Utrecht and Hilversum. Although we have covered 97km s today we still have about 4 hours riding time to get back to Amsterdam. It has been a beautiful day here and Roel and I are enjoying a slower ride back through the National Parks here.

There is an outstanding cycle network with numbered intersections. The way we are travelling is by selecting a series of the numbered intersections along the route we want to travel and then going from one to the other. It is a kind of join the dots on bikes. It has worked extremely well unless we have encountered road works that prevent is from following the signs in which case it becomes a bit of a lottery if we get back on track straight away.

Tomorrow we should be back in Amsterdam by early afternoon and then the cleanup starts..... We will keep maintaining the blog until we are leaving for New Zealand (19 September) or maybe even after that if the trip home is worth mentioning.



31.08.2012

Safely back in Amsterdam

We have now returned to Amsterdam and have settled back at Piet Heyn and Liesbeth's house. The cleanup has begun...

We had a wet start to the day so delayed leaving the camping until it cleared a bit at midday. It was a nice ride back although we were battling a strong headwind all the way. By the time we got to Amsterdam it was late afternoon and we were quite tired. We got ourselves cleaned up and went and had a very nice meal with Piet Heyn and Liesbeth.

We did a bit of weighing of our gear and I had carried 25 kgs of gear in the bags on the bike which is about 14 kgs. I had lost about 6 kg in weight during the ride. Now very few of the clothes I came over with fit!

Roel had a much heavier bike (19 kg) and carried 26 kg in gear. He also carried most of the food so the weight varied a bit as we travelled. He has also lost about 5 kg in weight although he didn't have any excess to loose!

During the ride we had one puncture to Roel's rear tyre, replaced the chain on Roel's bike and he used two sets of brake pads. Roel also broke the front pannier rack which we

repaired at the time with wire and duct tape. I had a front gear cable replacement. Both bikes will need to have a good clean and other worn parts will need to be replaced but they have both been very reliable during the trip.

We lost a couple of items - one pair sunglasses, both knives, and two polyprop tops.

At this time we are planning a shorter multiple day trip sometime next week (if the weather is good) which will take us to the coast to the dunes and around a bit of northern Holland. Other than that we will just do day trips around here. I will be updating the blog so you can still follow what we are doing until we leave to come home.



THE WARM DOWN

04.09.2012

On the road again...

Yes, we are on the way again. It was good to have a long weekend with the family in Amsterdam and tell some stories and hear how they were. We walked to and through a market and found it hard to get used to the crowd on Saturday. We cleaned the bikes and decided to use them again to visit the family in Amstelveen instead of using the tram on Sunday. We got a cable replaced on one of the bikes on Monday and had to leave it there for a day, so we hired a bike to pick up the Eurail pass from DHL, which we had already successfully used. We then met a Canadian couple on tour-bikes with packs by a McDonalds on the way and heard their stories about their 10th trip in Europe on bikes. They agreed, that once you are biking around and seeing the details of Europe you just can't stay put in one place for too long. Because we talked to them we had to rush back on the bikes to return the hire-bike in Amsterdam from the other site of the airport. By Schiphol we crossed the path of this Jumbo-Jet.



We had already quietly planned an easy trip through the North-West of Holland so off we went on Tuesday morning. We negotiated the traffic hazards of Amsterdam centrum. Did not get noticed by any waiters at the coffee-culture Leidseplein on the side where we were able to park the bikes, so decided to move on from one canal to another. Pushing bikes through road-works, against peak-hour traffic (mainly bikes) occasionally even (legally) at the wrong side of the road. Via the Central Station bicycle-parking tower to a free ferry

across Amsterdam Harbour. We had a choice of four of these all with queues of waiting bikes, so probably picked the wrong one and had quite a job to navigate in the direction we wanted. Then finally we found the way to Zaandam where I was amazed to see, that the canal where I had my first rowing race many years ago is now covered with flat-blocks. We emerged from this city madness to the quiet beauty of the Zaanse Schans where an old-style village has been nicely restored complete with a number of the old windmills, which used to power this area.

Getting out of the big city always takes longer than simply riding, so we were hungry. The queue for the Dutch pancakes was too long, so we asked and found the way to a fresh bakery and this one was a feast to the eye and nostrils. We made our choice and ate some of it immediately on a seat in front of the shop with a couple from ... the Kapiti Coast (New Zealand), which we met in the same shop.

From there we rode towards the east through the picturesque polderland (under sea level) of Holland towards the coast of the IJsselmeer, which has been partly saved from reclamation. The protest actions have saved some of the traditions of flatbottom old Dutch boats as shown here.

We found out from the Info-office, that we could still reach the off-shore island of Marken via the causeway in time to catch the ferry from there to Volendam. Both these places are well-known for their traditional dresses, now mainly worn for tourists and on special days. Just north of Volendam we reached the town famous for the Dutch cheese under the name of 'Edam'. We found a nice camp-ground overlooking the 'sea' (IJsselmeer) and slept again just as well in the tent as we had in the 'proper' bed in Amsterdam.

05.09.2012

The Dutch Dunes trip.

History of the VOC and the Zuiderzee

The VOC or Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie sailed its tall ships from Amsterdam and other harbours along the Zuiderzee in the 1600s and 1700s. They sailed to the 'East Indies' including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and other countries to bring back spices, tea and other delicacies. The Zuiderzee was then a large bay protected by a string of Islands on the north coast of Holland where these tall ships could off-load their booty in places like Hoorn, Enkhuizen en Medemblik. These places still show the richness of the East Indies traders who built their warehouses, shops and estates there. Many of those old buildings are still standing today or have been carefully restored or rebuilt.

The harbours were also used for fisheries who sailed the Zuiderzee and the North Sea with flat-bottom vessels called Tjalks and Bidders. The flat bottoms of these boats allowed these ships to also navigate the extensive mudflats in these areas and therefore have instead of keels an adjustable board on each side, like centreboards but not in the middle, which function as keels depending on the way the ship is listing. Quite a number of these



boats are still sailing here and others have been rebuilt or built from previous plans from combinations of old and new materials.

So, a lot of the old history can still be seen here, but conditions have changed a lot. A 32 kilometer dyke now protects the old Zuiderzee (now called IJsselmeer) from storms and spring tides. Large ships can no longer enter the bay, but a canal from the North Sea to Amsterdam has ensured that Amsterdam has maintained its status of a world harbour. Regularly the tall ships get together there to revive the glory of yesterdays sailing in spectacular displays. The old VOC towns on the IJsselmeer still do some fishing, mainly for eels and flat-fish, but the flat-bottom boats are now used for tourism by providing an impressive sight for onlookers or an old-fashioned sailing experience for people who like the smell of salt, rope and tar. About 40 percent of the old bay has now been reclaimed and a combination of causeways and dykes has created sheltered watersport, fishing and bathing areas.

We followed the old dyke along the east side of the IJsselmeer today and particularly had a

good look at the harbours of Hoorn and Enkhuizen. This was not the first time we had been here, because in 1997 we had taken the kids to the Zuiderzee museum in Enhuizen where they wore the old traditional outfits and played traditional games like stilt-walking and hoops. From there we had sailed with them to Hoorn and saw a fleet of Tjalks sailing past. Now, there are even more of these ships and the harbours have grown to accommodate large fleets of contemporary yachts in their marinas as well.

We had a great day cycling the coast here along dykes with nicely tar-sealed cycle-ways and traditional cobblestone streets in beautiful weather, be it with some head-wind. For the record we biked 75 kms on this day.

06.09.2012

Today we left Geuzenbuurt camping. There were a few fresh mole mounds near the tent and I suspect there was one running around thinking it might be able to party with Pai during the night! They are very elusive and the closest we have got to seeing one are the few that are dead along the cycle paths.

We continued along the coast in nice dry sunny weather. We turned inland when we had got to Opperdoes and crossed over more farming areas. The villages up here are very traditional and it is nice to ride through them. Often we stop for a coffee in the morning and have a wander around them. At Middenmeer we stopped for coffee and the village had been 'bombed' by knitters. All the lamp posts and other fixtures were covered in knitted panels. Even an orca statue had been dressed up. It was a colourful atmosphere right through the place.

The cafe we stopped at had been decorated with paintings all over it's walls and ceilings and was across the road from an old tobacco factory built in 1878. The front of this building was quite impressive with it's nice facade.

As we wandered around here we stopped outside a camping shop to photograph Pai inside a tent on display. It was just the right size for him!

By early afternoon we had reached Den Helder and preparing to cross over to the island of Texel. This is a small island famous for it's sheep. The island is a very interesting place.





We found many small communities with a couple of larger towns to support them with shops etc. We rode up the east side with a short diversion to Den Burg, the biggest town.

We found a nice farmers camping for the night just out of De Cocksdorp. They had cattle which are kept in a large barn all year round. The majority of their land is used to grow the grass and maize that is fed to the cattle twice a day and to have camping guests. The island seems to be relying on agriculture and tourism for its economic support. It is a very popular camping area if prices are anything to go by. The larger camping grounds demanding over 30 euros for a tent site for the night.

We watched the sun go down in a blaze of colour before tucking into the sleeping bags.



07.09.2012

We woke to a dry day but plenty of wind not from a very favourable direction! We first rode up to the very top of the island and looked at the lighthouse before turning south and starting back towards Amsterdam. The way back for us is down the east coast of the island which takes us through the dunes. These are very similar to what we have ridden through in Denmark.

It has been a nice change to have a bit of undulating land to ride through.

By the time we got to the ferry terminal for the return to the mainland the boat was just getting ready to leave – perfect timing. There was an amazing number of cars waiting to board so people obviously go over quite a lot.

We met a couple from California who had hired bikes for a trip around similar to ours. They were doing it the opposite way.

We had a tough ride into the wind from Den Helder but once we turned to directly south it was a bit easier. We continued to ride through the dunes with stops along the way for coffee and lunch.

The sun has been out so much lately that there are many people out on their bikes enjoying the fine weather.



We are spending the night at a camping ground just south of St. Maartens. When we first enquired about cost for camping the price was 27 euros but we made it clear that would be too much for us. We decided to get a plate of chips at the snack bar before moving on and during the time we were getting into those the receptionist came over to say she could accommodate us for 17.85 euros if we wanted to stay. This is much more in line with what we expected so we are now going off to cook dinner and put the tent up!

08.09.2012

Today has dawned a fine sunny day and we continue our travels along the south coast. Being a Saturday here it is quite busy with lots of people taking advantage of some predicted late summer weekend of hot temperatures.

We have taken a bit of a side path inland through Bergen and stumbled upon a village market. It has been set up in the middle of town around a ruined church. The original church was built around 1200 and attacked and ruined but several people have made attempts to restore various parts of it. At present it appears to have a front part with an altar and a house built into the rear which is now basically a museum and information kiosk. There are signs of Romanesque architecture in the old parts that are still standing.

While wandering through the market we found the closest imitation of the Norwegian Statoil buns! They were triangular buns with chocolate chips – not quite as good as the Norwegian ones but good hunger busters!

After leaving Bergen we continued south east to Alkmaar. This is an old town that thrived in the past on the cheese industry. In the center of the town is the old cheese auction



house that on Fridays comes alive with a traditional cheese market in the cobbled square next to it. The building is beautiful and features wonderful pieces of art and sculptures. It was a busy place which has large numbers of terrace cafes that were well patronised.

After leaving Alkmaar we headed back out to the dunes via Egmond aan Zee. There the local historians had a display of an old fishing boat 'Pinck'. It was a replica built from the original drawings of the boat that was wrecked not far from here. A big solid boat constructed by hand from Oak. Not far from the museum there was a sculpture of a rescue boat sitting in the dunes below the light house. A nice piece next to the cycle path. Along this coast of Holland there are many lighthouses and like Denmark, the seas have claimed many lives. We frequently come across the memorials to the rescue crews and there are still many locations where the coastal rescue services have their bases.

We continued through the dunes to Wijk aan Zee and found a small camping that is run by volunteers who are members of a cooperative style camping set up, called NIVO. When we arrived we were offered a cup of coffee and we sat and chatted about our travels etc. Eric was a fanatical aircraft buff and he had great pleasure in showing us the photos and application he had on his I-Pad for following all the planes over Holland. We had a lot of fun with these people and enjoyed staying at their small camping area.

09.09.2012

Today is another one out of the fine weather box – not a cloud in the sky!

We headed south out of Wijk aan Zee with the aim of crossing the North Sea Canal to Ijmuiden but when we reached the crossing point we needed to phone a ferry (water taxi) so we retraced our route back and went via the outskirts of Beverwijk to cross over at the locks. As we arrived there a cruise ship was just entering the locks on its way into Amsterdam. There were three locks side by side that catered for a variety of sizes of vessels so we had an interesting ride over all three.

Ijmuiden is where Holland has its great steel mills and cement works. They were working 24-7 and billow out copious quantities of white smoke which we could see from miles away. Around the northern side of the mills on the road to the beach are some steel sculptures





in the dunes. On the return ride we found the cycle way that wove in and around these.

After crossing the locks we joined the crowds of people who were making their way to the beaches for the day. Riding through the dunes was very pleasant. We came across another herd of the Highland cattle they have in the parks here.

Just before we got to Zandvoort we turned east towards Amsterdam and found our way through to Piet Heyn and Liesbeth's summer house on the Nieuwemeer. Nieuwemeer is a large lake that borders the polder that Schiphol airport is built in. We had a catch up with them and then had a cruise around the lake on their boat. After we left the lake part we had a short cruise down the canal and passed quite a few house boats. The water ways were very busy with boats and people swimming. It was a lovely way to spend the late afternoon relaxing and then we returned to the Amsterdam house after we collected the keys.

Altogether we covered close to 400km s for this 'warm down' tour. Now it's back to cleaning the gear again!

15.9.2012 - our last day of cycling in Europe (at least for this year)

Friesland - the final province

During our tour we had covered all 11 Dutch provinces pretty well, with one exception. We had not actually been to Friesland, the province in the mid-north of the Netherlands. It is another rather rural and flat part of the country, but different in many ways. The people speak a language, which is similar to Dutch, but it is a language on its own. They play a sport called 'Kaatsen', which is unknown anywhere else, but they are also very keen ice-skaters like all Dutch people. Whenever the ice is strong enough, they organise an ice-skating race of 240 km around 11 main towns in Friesland, called the 'Elf-steden-tocht'. Due to global warming the race is not often contested these days, but people still either do an alternative race in Austria of the same distance or there is an option to do the route by bicycle.

We didn't have time to do another 240 km ride, but after a few days off we were itchy to do some more riding. Also, we still had a Eurail pass with some unused days, so we decided to take the bikes by train to Friesland. We found out that the train trip alone would take more than two hours each way, but there was an alternative. The train could take us to Enkhuizen (already visited on our North Holland tour) and from there we could take a ferry across the IJsselmeer to Stavoren in Friesland. We had to be at Amsterdam Central station by 7 am to catch the train, so off we went in the dark.

At Enkhuizen we were joined by a large group of cyclists who were planning to go around the IJsselmeer via the 'Afsluitdijk', a 34 km dyke which had turned the large bay into a lake in 1933. We decided to leave them to it, because it would take us back into North Holland where we had already been and their road bikes were too fast for us. We took it easy and had a good look at some of the historic places such as Stavoren and Hindelopen and worked our way up the west coast of Friesland up to Harlingen with mainly nice tail-winds. From there we turned East and reached Franeker.

In Franeker is a house, where Eise Eisinga between 1774 and 1781 built a huge 'Planetarium' in his living room. It models the positions of all the then-known planets accurately through a system of a single pendulum driving an enormous clock-work of gears with more than 10000 hand-made nails. It even shows phases of the moon and displays times and dates accurately and still does that now. We spent a lot of time in the museum, which has now been set up in the house, because this is indeed a fascinating piece of engineering with an amazing history.



After a cup of coffee at the cafe next door we came out in the street to see and hear a street organ play 'happy birthday' to one of the old patrons. Then it was time to find the railway station and return to Amsterdam to farewell the family and pack up for the flight home.

21.9.2012

And now? Yes, we have safely arrived home again in Auckland. Of course the journey from our Amsterdam base to the airport was an adventure in itself. We missed one train, switched to an overloaded subway tram and then on a Schiphol train in peak-hour with one bike-in-a-bag and another to be packed in a huge KLM box at the airport, plus a full suitcase. We spare you the details of the Airbus flights with two rather heavy landings and the joy (?) of a hotel in crowded Dubai, 4 hours sleep and a buffet breakfast. We arrived home to find that the home front had balloons out and a banner with 'Welcome Home, Mum and Dad'. The house was clean and stocked up with food. Thanks to all involved!

Also thanks to all you supporters who kept following us on this blog. Your encouragement helped us to keep going on several occasions. We may have missed some of the best parts of this 'trip of a lifetime', if we had decided to give up or turn south, when the weather forecast for north was not so good. Please contact us, if you think we can help you with your plans. Don't underestimate what you can undertake, when you put your mind to it.

Roel and Di



During the trip we carried the following equipment.

Black text is per person items and green text is shared items.

Clothing	
2	cycle shirts
2	pairs of cycling shorts
1	long polyprop bottoms
1	long sleeve polyprop top
1	Polar fleece top
1	rain jacket
1	overpants
3	pairs of socks
1	Umbrella hat
1	Bandana
1	Polypropylene gloves
1	Cycling gloves
1	Helmet
Casual Clothing	
1	Zip-off pants
1	Long sleeve shirt
1	T shirt
3	pairs of underpants
Sleeping Gear	
1	Sleeping bag (in nylon bag)
1	Sleeping bag liner
1	Inflatable pillow
1	Thermarest mattress
1	Tent (in nylon bag)
	Poles (in nylon bag)
	Pegs
1	Ground sheet
Cooking Gear	
1	Three-quart pot

1	Pot lid
1	Knife-fork-spoon set
1	Cup
1	Plate and bowl
2	On bike bottles
1	Cutting Board
1	Sharp knife (Leatherman)
	Matches
1	Gas stove
2	Gas cannisters
1	Teatowel
1	Dish washing sponge
1	Water filter (in nylon bag)
	Spare food
	Daily food
Spare Parts	
1	Tube
	Lube
	Extra spokes
	Spare brake and gear cables
	Spare brake pads
	Hanger
Tools (bag in the right rear pannier)	
	Multi Tool
	Pump
	Leatherman
	Cone wrenches
	Chain tool
	Spoke tool
	Crank extractor
	Tire levers
	Tire patch kit
	Duct tape
	Spare nuts, bolts, brake pieces

	Pedal rebuild kit
	Crescent
	Bike cleaning rag
	Zip ties
	Chain whip
Personal Supplies	
	Toilet Paper
	First Aid kit
	Chamois cream
	Water purifying tablets
	Mylar survival bag
	Scissors
	Hand mirror
	Comb
	Toothbrush/toothpaste
	Dental floss
	Towel
	Face cloth
	Chap stick
	Suntan lotion
	Liquid soap
	Baby wipes
1	Headlamp
Odds & Ends	
3	Water bottles
1	Water purifier/filter
1	Bike lock
	Needles and thread
	Pens
	Notepad
	Compass
	Map board
	Small wallet with ID, credit cards
	Keys (bike lock and pannier)

	Road maps
	Cycle route map
	Bungee cords
Electronic Equipment	
1	Computer
1	GPS
1	Cell Phone
1	Lumix Camera
1	GoPro Camera
1	Gorilla pod
1	Charger
	Extra batteries (4 AA)