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Norway 2015

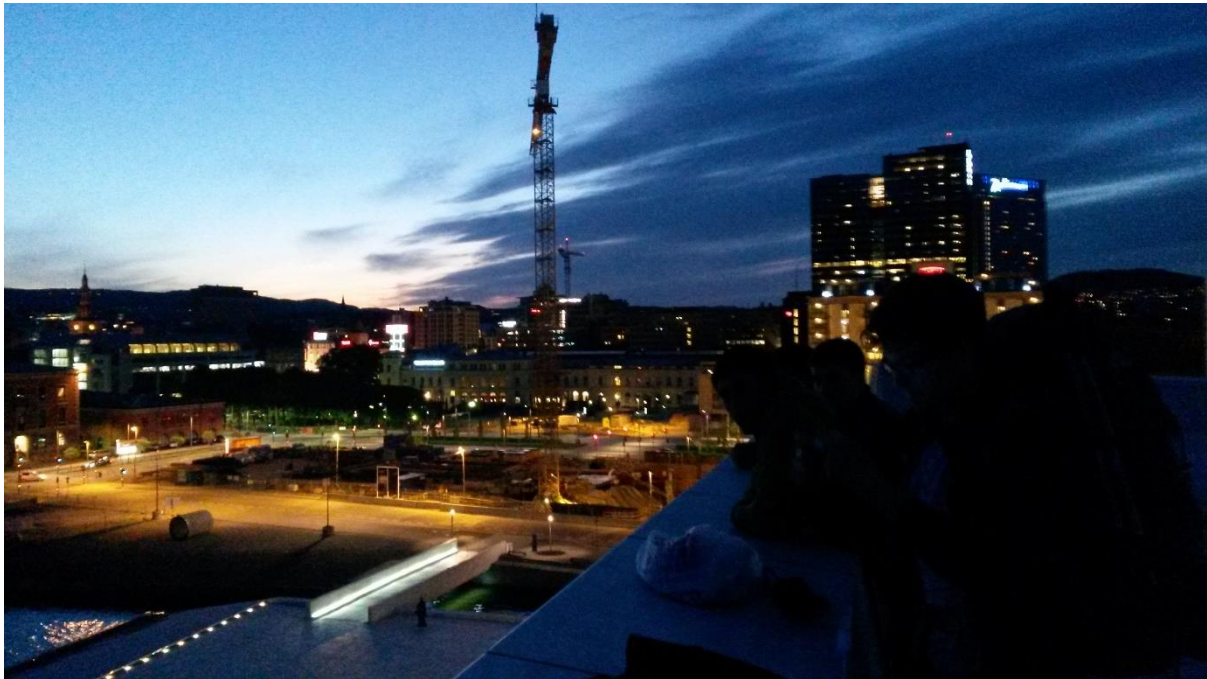
Extracts from the Journal of Gavin Dewar

(18th June – 2nd July)

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Thurs 18th June (Between Otta and Rondane Nasjonalpark)



(23:10)

Rain on canvas. The distant sound of squawking and trilling birds. Janos and Josh chatting in a muffled, tired, excited flow. Ollie occasionally singing “My mind’s telling me *no...*” from his tent. These are the sounds I hear as our first day hiking in Norway draws to a close.

I can see clearly – the night is still bright, so that it could almost be a drizzly late afternoon. Andy lies beside me, chasing sleep and rapidly catching up with it.

I have my warm grey jumper on (The bulky one Aunt Stella and Uncle Neil gave me for Christmas), and know it was a smart move despite its size – there is little chance of me feeling the same night chill that bit me in the Cairngorms in April.

My lower body is cloaked in my sleeping bag. I take a long, deep swig of cool, clear water and feel it course through my tired body.

A stressed morning in Oslo, the wait for the Oslo-to-Otta train, the journey through the glens and past the calm inland fjords of southern Norway, the complications of trying to get out of Otta and into the wilderness –

All are slowly melting away.

Money stress, regular contact with home, correspondences with work and uni, transport plans –

They are becoming a distant fog.

Orkney, Mallaig, Loch Lomond, London, Caen, Paris –

There is only Norway.

And now here we are, a steep three-hour-walk out of Otta, in the damp woodlands on Rondane’s doorstep. And slowly everything is floating into clarity as I slip towards sleep.

(23:33)



Fri 19th June (South of Rondvatnet, Rondane)



(22:15)

The wildness of the mountain has torn away the calmness of the wooded foothills. The planned six hours of exploration developed into ten hours of hard slog through incline, ford, and soft melting snow.

2000 metre peaks loomed above us, white and grey-spotted. They sprayed us with freezing winds as we trudged, fell, trudged, island-hopping until we eventually neared the site of the Rondvassbu bothy.

An hour or two ago, I silently pleaded to the mountain to show some mercy. Storsmeden, the white wall to the north, replied by sending a fierce weather front our way, blocking out the sun which bathed the valleys far behind and below.

But when we reached the southern shore of Rondvatnet, where we finally spotted the bothy-cabins by the water, the mountain rewarded us for our tenacity.

The view stunned us all as we stared from our ridge up the frozen lake, the towering peak to east and west tenderly dousing it in fog.

We are camped on this ledge above Rondvatnet, exhausted, cold (Ollie is really struggling to heat up beside me as I write), concerned about our planned route –

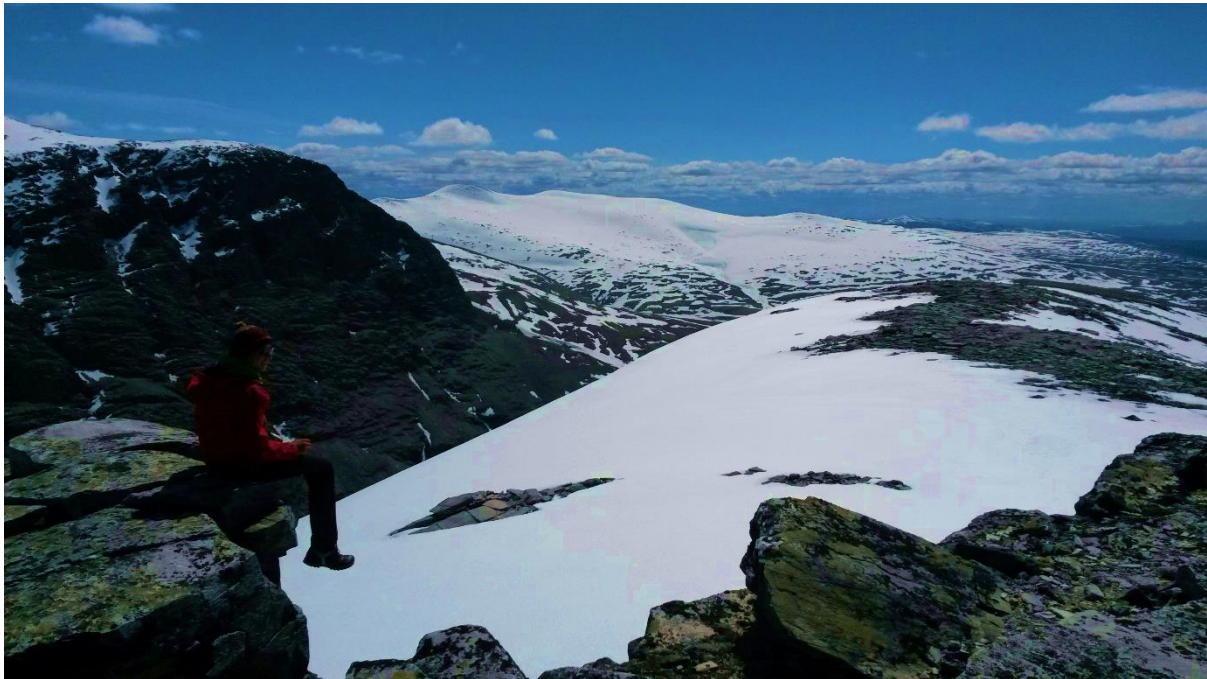
But full of food: Spinach, kidney beans, couscous. A godsend. And blessed by the wonders of the Rondane, for this night at least.

(22:32)



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Sat 20th June (North of Rondvatnet, Rondane)



(22:16)

Rain and wind gave way to blazing sun this morning, so we decided to bite the bullet and surge straight north, over the snow-covered shoulder above Rondvatnet's western shore.

A few hours hiking, then a long rest in the glens beyond, we convinced each other.

Six hours later, drenched, exhausted, elated, we set up camp in the beautiful valley which the mountain spat us out in to. Framheim 3 (We have taken to calling out campsites 'Framheim' in honour of Norwegian adventurer Roald Amundsen's Antarctic expedition, which we read up on at the Fram museum in Oslo) is a quiet, peaceful place on the edge of a small, semi-frozen body of water, fed by a splashing stream of meltwater.

Today's first five hours were just as shattering as yesterday's, the snow becoming deeper and more treacherous as we reached about 1700 metres.

The vastness of the last snowdrift near the crest was intimidating and blinding in the sun. Janos thrust his sunglasses into my hands at one point as we plunged on, step by tortured step, despite my protests. "Seriously," He rightly insisted, "You'll need these. Just *say* when you need something." And I cursed myself for having forgotten my own pair. The half-hour or so of eye protection may well have prevented the dull, distant ache I feel in my eyes now from turning into real pain.

We surged as hard as we could, usually with Andy, Janos and I taking turns to agonisingly break the snow. Ollie pushed admirably through exhausting phases of short breath, and Josh, whether as a result of unfortunate gear or technique, found himself lagging behind as he plunged deep into the snow with near enough every step, failing to find purchase in the rapidly softening whiteness.

Andy, who pulled ahead as we reached that final, vast stretch of snow, took us some way across, waited for us, allowed a more lightly-equipped quartet of Norwegian girls to overtake us, and made an executive decision: "Guys, we're heading up to the ridge," he called, gesturing up the sheer slope to our right, between the buried path and the drop into Rondvatnet, which we had previously vetoed for fear of an intervening gorge.

Leaving his backpack with our short-breathed selves, he followed old footprints towards the ridge, scouted ahead, returned, and ordered: “Guys, I really don’t want to sound patronising, but listen up. The snow is pretty hard apart from a deep bit in the middle. We should go in this order: Me, Josh, Ollie, then you two.”

He apologised unnecessarily for being “patronising” again, turned, and led us towards the ridge.

Panting. Blazing snow. Crunching, sinking footsteps. Ollie wheezing ahead of me. Janos trudging in determined silence behind. Sweating. Grunting.

Then rock. Dry rock, coated in the hardy florescent pale-green lichen that flourishes in this harsh place. And we were on the ridge.

To the north, it led upwards to the crest, where we would be able to assess the land ahead and reconnect to the path. To the east, the white field we had hauled ourselves up from, and the towering Veslesmeden rearing up behind it. To the south, the long upwards slog from Framheim 2, and the far green valleys we had travelled from. And to the west, the land fell sharply and magnificently into the frozen waters of Rondvatnet, before surging abruptly up and up, impossibly high.

We pushed on up the ridge, and finally collapsed against the cairn – possibly the highest point of land we will reach this whole fortnight.

Euphoria hit us as we ate our lunch there, on top of the world, looking north into the glorious belly of the Rondane Nasjonalpark. Ollie collapsed with a sigh and looked content; Josh dashed around with his camera, blurting statements about “the perfect photo”; Janos perched himself on a dramatic ledge, the Norwegian flag on his pack flapping slowly in the breeze, ever the explorer; and Andy took his ancient, precision camera reverently out of its case to use up one more of his precious twenty-or-so shots on the most irresistibly artsy section of the astounding panorama he could find.

I took all this in while wrapping myself in my roasting hot jacket and applying yet another layer of sun cream. I was elated too – I just didn’t want my elation to lead to a layer of my distinctly Scottish skin being scorched off.

We blasted down the snowy north face, occasionally halting to haul one of our party out of a particularly deep or treacherous patch, and suddenly found ourselves in the warm, dry, yellow-green glen below.

The hours we have spent in our campsite since have been luxuriously sunny, and we have filled ourselves with another perfect mish-mash dinner of beans, sun-dried tomatoes, olives and pasata in couscous while setting the world to rights. The nature of socialism, the teaching of history, the troubling prospects of Tory rule in Britain, and highlights of literature and story-telling video games have all been on the agenda. As have fart jokes, shitting techniques, and masturbation innuendoes.

Now, my body shutting down slowly, I’m off to sleep with Janos drifting off in his sleeping bag beside me. The night has cooled and the wind has picked up, but the inside of the tent is warm.

(23:09)



Sun 21st June (Haverdalen, Rondane)



(23:32)

The march up the glen into the heart of Rondane was spectacular this morning, but a bit of a slog. Finally we reached the end of the valley, which opened into scree and scrubby trees and eventually, as we approached the Døralseter bothy, fertile green land. (“It’s not a bothy!” Andy kept insisting – and yes, it was more of a village, albeit an eerily empty one.)

But we didn’t stay in Døraldalen long, instead dragging our aching bodies up into the northwards pass above us, which would lead us out of Rondane’s cold, sparse, peaceful core. Again, we expected it to go quickly. Again we were proved spectacularly wrong.

Traversing snow walls; clinging to near-vertical banks of crumbly moss; hurtling down stony scree; picking our way through sharp grey scree – the pass threw us a fair few dangers, which Andy’s leadership proved to be the main factor in conquering.

By the time we stumbled out of the last, truly terrifyingly icy snow-slope, and threw ourselves on to dry land above the beautifully fertile Haverdalen where we are camping now, we were a hugging, whooping company of adrenaline-pumped idiots.

We built a campfire tonight as we tucked into couscous-tuna-olives-sundried-tomatoes-pasata (Which tasted heavenly), and wearily chatted and joked as the day caught up with us.

I’m in Ollie’s tent now. The river rushes, a bird sings, and Ollie’s gentle sleep-breathing is telling me to do the same.

(23:49)



Mon 22nd June (Above Hjerkinn, Dovre Nasjonalpark)



(23:14)

I am sitting in the entrance of Andy's tent, watching a spectacular sunset. The undersides of the clouds blaze orange, the canopies purple-grey. The sky is a soft blue. The moon is a smooth crescent.

Andy is reading a book on Revolutionary Europe behind me. My feet are bare – I have just cut my toenails with the small fold-up scissors Mum gave me, and my wrinkled toes badly needed an air and a dry anyway.

Janos's Norwegian flag flutters proudly and tiredly in the centre of Framheim 5. The muffled roar of a nearby river covers the sound of distant, irregular traffic in the wide, lightly populated valley below.

We have done it. We have crossed the Rondane and Dovre national parks in more or less one piece. Apart from, that is, Janos's aching knee, Ollie's shattered body, Josh's struggling rucksack, Andy's twinged back, and my sunburnt eyeballs (Apparently it's a thing!).

Today, we set off from Framheim 4 in Haverdalen at 9:00, hauling ourselves over the hill and out of Rondane (About 7km) in a few hours. We then spent a luxurious and unscripted couple of hours downing coffee in the homely but quiet Grimdalshytta hiker's lodge, while chatting to the eccentric Norwegian warden and two concerned but friendly German guys who were planning on doing our trek in reverse. We warned them about the severity of the snow, and they in turn told us about the route ahead. We wished them luck, thanked the warden, ate lunch outside, nearly died laughing at some ill-thought-out statements by Josh, and pushed on into the serene Dovre national park.

Somehow, through pain and exhaustion, we pushed right through Dovre, over moors and rivers and a vast, quiet nature reserve.

At times we trudged in determined silence. At other times we laughed and encouraged and mocked and chatted about books and films and people and memories, or pointed out the droppings in the snow-patches and rock formations on the horizon.

And now here we are, with the village of Hjerkinn, and the train to Trollheimen, just behind the curve of the hills ahead.

A long, toy-sized cargo train is snaking out of a tunnel in the Dovrefjell mountains across the valley.

Time to rest.

(23:35)



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Tues 23rd/Wed 24th June (Renndølsetra, Innerdalen, Trollheim Nasjonalpark)



(01:10)

These mountains are magical.

We walked for two hours into Hjerkind today, and one of the very few north-bound trains arrived just as we were checking the ghost-town-quiet station's timetable. A friendly but no-nonsense conductor marched us through the carriages to a space to dump our bags, while telling Janos about the dangers of the Rondane muskox. ("Did you see any moose-cox? Yes, *moose-cox*. Very dangerous, moose-cox.") As we were preparing to leave the train at Oppdal, an English passenger joked (Or at least part-joked) to us: "To be frank, your first stop should be the shower."

In Oppdal, we started dragging our shattered selves towards a café, before deciding instead to check the bus times first. A coach was preparing to leave towards Sunndalsøra, our destination, as we approached. "We leave in two minutes," the driver, a solemn but helpful grey-haired and craggy-faced man, told us. "The next one? Hmm. Nine o'clock."

We got on the bus.

Trollheimen reared up alongside us. Where Rondane is squat, Trollheimen is sheer. Where Rondane is desolate, Trollheimen is lush.

In Sunndalsøra, we piled miserably into a diner-café and tore into burgers, before trying to suss out some way to get into the mountains without destroying ourselves. Andy and I soon found some laid-back taxi drivers sprawled around their office, watching TV. One of them, a bespectacled man with grey-flecked hair and broken English, looked up the mountain track route we had proposed on a clunky PC.

"We have five people and five rucksacks." We pointed out as he showed us around his five-seater estate car.

"If you fit in, okay. Let's go."

"We need to shop first," Janos, who had just joined us, pointed out. "Can you give us an hour?"

The taxi driver made a doubtful noise. "I prefer to go now. But okay. Shop quick."

And so we all took shifts storming around the nearby supermarket while some of us guarded the rucksacks in the diner, and hurtled back to the taxi office. We found the driver smoking outside quite casually. He didn't seem phased at all by his enormously heavy cargo – only mildly entertained as we tried to ram it all in, crushing ourselves in process. Especially Ollie, who was wedged into the boot.

The driver took us out of town, through tunnels and hills and along the fjord, and all the way up a mountain track to the car park at the mouth of the damp and foggy Innerdalen valley. He waved away our gratitude as we piled out of the taxi in a flood of smelly clothes and luggage and excitedly started decanting and packing our new food supplies, wishing us luck as he rocketed back down the road.

We started walking, shortly coming across a quiet set of farm buildings. As we passed by, I spotted something moving across the lawn to our right, and pointed it out. It was a robot lawn mower – a purring black creature using sensors to bumble its way around the garden. As we stood and stared, it turned our way and charged headlong towards Josh's feet, and we hurried away, howling with laughter at our encounter with the bizarre robot guardsman of Innerdalen.

A painful trek sharply uphill through the dripping, verdant, cloud-smothered valley left us both exhilarated and utterly exhausted. Waterfalls thundered across the dale. We considered and rejected a couple of campsites in boggy clearings, before spotting a vast bonfire beside a tranquil-looking farm on the far shore of the wide lake before us, Innerdalsvatna.

We came across the owner, a young, bright-eyed and bearded man, working on some fencing by the path, and we asked about nearby camping.

“Camp here!” He insisted. “There is flat land on the far side of the field, by the river. No cost.”

The field led us near by the bonfire we had seen, where some farm volunteers and travellers were warming themselves and chatting. Andy encouraged us to join them after setting up camp. The bonfire, it turned out was part of a midsummer festival across Norway – the warden at Grimdalshytta had told us about it yesterday.

We ended up chatting to some friendly, open, hugely generous Norwegians. One girl, a student of toxicology, told us enthusiastically about her expedition to Svalbard and her passion for poisons. We played with some dogs – two corgis and a beautiful collie, which a pair of kids told me was called Muskox, like the wild animals in Rondane the Hjerkin train conductor had warned us of.

We found ourselves chatting to the owner and his young, bald, cannily-smiling right-hand-man as people began to drift away for the night, and they told us all about the farm, Renndølsetra, and the valley, Innerdalen. Then, the chief said: “I have been meaning to ask: whose is that green tent? The one closest to us?”

“Mine...” Ollie replied cautiously.

“Ah. Only, it might be in the middle of a bee nest.” Mouths dropped. “And fairly rare bees, too.”

Everyone but a concerned-looking Ollie burst into surprised laughter, before the chief led us over and showed us the tiny holes in the ground which we had completely failed to notice. “I have been meaning to fence this patch up. Sorry! Don't worry, you won't have killed many. It's just, they will try to get out of the holes in the morning and may end up in your tent.”

As Ollie and Josh evacuated their stuff from the tent in preparation to move it, the chief said: “If your stuff is wet, you can dry it in our dry room.” He then led us back to the volunteers' quarters, a cosy wooden lodge by the farmhouse, and showed us the dry room as we struggled to take in his generosity.

“Ah here are the two ducklings I found abandoned earlier!” He said, and we peered into a box to see two warm, sleepy balls of yellow-black fluff.

“You may have to abandon them too.” The chief’s right-hand-man said as he passed by. “If their parent has left them, then they are on their own. It is the way of nature.”

But the chief seemed determined not to entertain the notion.

Walking back outside, we chatted more, but were interrupted shortly by the chief noticing the mother duck finally returning to her nest. He sprinted into the dry room to grab the ducklings and reunite them with their careless parent.

All of us were struggling to internalise how wonderful this place was as we wandered slowly back into the field. We decided to return to the dying midsummer bonfire before putting our boots and socks in the dry room.

As we sat by the fire, two figures emerged from the woods. A woman, wrapped in a white-blue blanket, and a man, with a case on his back. They greeted us in Norwegian, before reverting to English when we “umm”ed and “err”ed.

“We are from the tourist hut further down the track,” The man said. “I have a saxophone – we are going to make some music.” He laughed. “Now we have an audience I guess!”

“We thought there would be people around the campfire, but nobody was.” The elegant woman explained while warming up her voice for singing. “We were about to leave. And then we saw you, some distant figures heading across the field towards us.”

We built them a bench by the bonfire out of wooden palettes as they prepared.

“We also have wine. Would you like to share with us?”

Andy and I shared a look. Only slightly earlier, we had been discussing how good it would have been to have brought some wine from Sunndalsøra.

Our hodge-podge plastic cups filled, we declared “skål”, “sláinte”, and “cheers”, and these two mysterious figures began a jazzy, smooth rendition of ‘Summertime’ in the dying orange-blue glow of the fire – the very song that was playing on the TV when I was born. The woman sang and swayed, and the man mastered his saxophone, to Josh’s delight.

Later, we offered them whiskey from a hip flask, and told them about Scotland. They replied with tales of Norway, and then the man played a soft, lilting tune on a traditional Norwegian flute. The melody was from the play ‘Peer Gynt’, telling the story of a troll-hunting adventurer from near Rondane – We had passed an empty ‘Peer Gynt Hytta’ lodge on day two of our trek.

The woman gave us a parting story about the blanket she was wearing, saying she had simply found it and claimed it. These white cotton blankets with their blue borders, she told us, had kept Norwegian fighters warm in the cold nights of the Second World War.

With that, they disappeared through the blue smoke and into the woods.

Stunned by the perfection of the evening, and the script-like pacing of the day, we headed back to camp.

“I think we’ll need a couple of days to process what happened tonight,” Ollie observed as we shuffled through the dusk.

Those couple of days will hopefully be spent recuperating in this fertile, lush valley, beneath these sheer, magical mountains.

(02:22)



Wed 24th/Thurs 25th June (Renndølsetra, Innerdalen, Trollheimen)



(00:15)

Today, we rested. No alarm. No repacking. No long hike. Just reading, chatting, eating, and exploring. Our supplies may have taken a hit, but our energy and morale jumped immeasurably.

Clouds continued to cling to the mountaintops today, although the sun slowly started to burn through and reveal the true scale and beauty of Innerdalen when Andy and I went for our walk and talk further down the valley.

I spent the morning reading and napping by the cinders of yesterday's bonfire, finishing an Edge Chronicles book on my kindle, before the cold bit and we all regrouped to go and read in the cosy communal room in the farmhouse, with the other residents of the farm as company.

This place is a real haven.

(00:23)



Fri 26th June (Above Storli, Trollheimen)



(23:57)

I didn't have the energy to write an entry last night, as the tents were whipped and battered by wind, rain and fog far into the night. We were exhausted by the ascent up into the desolate mountain pass above Innerdalen's eastern reaches.

Earlier that day we gathered in the warm, wooded communal room in the Renndølsetra farm, our map stretched out before us, and we grimly set about planning our exit from peaceful Innerdalen. We would head east, towards the little village of Storli, we decided, then really push ourselves and tear northwards through the national park over a few days to the town of Rindal. We took a deep breath and gathered our belongings.

As the afternoon arrived, we packed up and said our goodbyes to the friendly bearded chief, whose name was Istein, the chatty, bald right-hand man, Jan, who it turned out was Istein's partner, and freckled, iron-featured Astrid, a girl whose face cracked with wide smiles and laughs when we eventually earned her respect. They gave us their email address and information they could about the valley ahead, and wished us heartfelt good luck.

When I brought up how generous everyone at Renndølsetra farm had been to us, Jan laughed and replied: "We're Norwegian!"

Onwards up Innerdalen we marched, sad to leave behind the haven of the farm but glad to be back on the move.

It was not long before we realised that the path ahead had been turned into a boggy marsh by a string of dark, damp days. Through a gleaming green glen we slogged, pushing glistening tree branches from our faces, watching the towering peaks above us occasionally burst from the clouds, and feeling our sodden bodies steam in the near-warmth.

Upon reaching the far end of Innerdalen after a number of hours, we decided the potential campsites near the valley floor were too soaked, and pushed up into the mountain pass above us.

Skiting over rocks and battered by a sudden vortex of chilled wind funnelling down the pass, we picked our way past patches of snow and scree into a dark fog. There, we tried to joke and reassure one another

as we set up camp on a harsh, mossy ledge and ate a rushed dinner from the hastily assembled stoves. But despite our efforts, Framheim 8 was a miserable place.

We dived into our sleeping bags.

The morning was less windy, but just as dark and damp. We eventually pushed on into roiling clouds of the high pass, after, for me, by far the most welcome mug of porridge of the trip so far.

We were soon nothing but a string of five shuffling figures in a sea of white, tramping over hard snow through a dense, bright white fog. We took care not to lose our way, and not for the first time were grateful for the bright red 'T's on Norway's well-placed way-markers and cairns. Despite this, a couple of near-misses occurred when we were forced to follow bearings or make educated guesses about which direction to follow.

When the clouds broke below us and we saw the isolated lochs we had pledged to eat our lunch at while examining the map, we were electrocuted with energy and joy – all but Janos, whose knee was really starting to become an issue.

As we tore happily into our food on the sandy southern shore of Tovatna, nearly feeling dry for the first time in twenty-four hours, he admitted that he didn't think his knee would take the hard path north to Rindal. We congregated, a grubby wee senate, and it was decided – we would head east, back to Oppdal, taking it easy and dedicating a day or two to day-walks from a base camp. Everyone was happy with the decision. I don't think Janos was the only person to feel relief.

So here we are, five kilometres on from that silver loch, on the wooded hill above the eerily quiet village of Storli. Earlier, we ventured into the settlement looking for a pub or shop. "Do you know where we can get alcohol!?" Andy squawked at a bemused pair of locals, seemingly having forgotten how to interact with normal people. We soon found out the place had no shop, and only opened its bars for pre-booked functions. It *did*, however, have public loos, which we made full, messy use of before heading back into the wild for the night.

I have just finished reading the book of short stories by Solzhenitsyn I brought in Camden Town, while Ollie snoozes beside me. Framheim 9 is very calm and happy.

(00:38)



Sun 28th June (West of Okla, Trollheimen)



(23:50)

As the end of my twentieth birthday approaches, I lie back in Andy's tent, ease my tired muscles, feel the warmth of a blazing couple of days on my face, and smile.

Yesterday, under an incredibly clear blue sky, we lazed about Framheim 9 in the sun for the morning, packed up, and headed back down to invade the public loos and tap in Storli. There, we talked to a chatty couple from Trondheim, who told us we wouldn't find it hard to find campsites just outside the city when we got there, then made our way to the unmanned hiker's hut above the Ångardsvatnet loch east of Storli. We were star-struck by all the unattended food, and hurled what kroner we could spare into the money box to stock up on chocolate or tinned fruit or some Norwegian sort-of-spam.

We came across a German traveller from Hamburg as we raided the Storlidalen hiker's hut ("There is no warden or anything?" He asked us, confused by the place too), who was delighted when he discovered Janos was German too. We ate a mighty lunch at a stone table in the roasting sunlight while petting a slightly derpy grey farm dog.

Then, we sweated our way up the hill behind Storlidalen, and, the ground finally flattening out, spent some time exploring the area at the foot of the bulky 1565 metre mountain Okla. We searched for a suitable place in the squelchy ground for Framheim 10.

We had dinner, and as the sun started to slink towards the mountains, prepared for a midnight expedition. We would welcome my twentieth birthday on the summit of Okla!

The climb was rough and we were all tired, but the mood was buoyant as boggy heather gave way to hardy moss, then stone, then snow, and all of a sudden we were up again at that higher plane, where your whole world consists of craggy white peaks fading into the horizon.

The setting sun painted everything and everyone an unforgettable orange.

We cheered at midnight, clustered around a freezing cold cairn, and Janos handed me a birthday chocolate bar to replenish my diminished supply, instantly becoming my favourite person in the world. Ollie passed around the hipflask and we each took a celebratory swig.

We lunged our way through a weird dance to keep warm, choreographed by Ollie and Janos, boiled some water for tea, coffee and hot chocolate on the trusty, battered Trangia, then picked our way back down the mountainside before it got too dark and cold.

Janos and I speculated on the way down whether those strange, massive paw prints we kept passing in the snow were indeed those of a wolf. Back in Innerdalen, Jan had after all warned us of a wolf that had wandered down through southern Trollheimen only recently, a loner separated from its pack in the north, and slaughtered two of their lambs on its way...

Ollie headed straight back to camp after the long, dusky, semi-sunlit descent, but Andy, Janos, Josh and I decided to stay on the scrubby shoulder above Framheim 10 and wait for the sunrise.

Andy bounced ecstatically as the world lit up at half past four. I, hit by exhaustion, could only sit by a boulder and let the sunlight of a new decade wash over me.

A long lie followed, our tents slowly baking our tired bodies in the sun. When we woke up today, we left our camp and headed north to the unmanned Vassendsetra hut above Gjevillvatnet's western shore to find out about possible ferries towards Oppdal. We found the same German from the previous hut sitting outside, and Janos asked him in German if the ferries were running this year. The hiker replied in his native tongue.

"*Scheisse*." Janos muttered grimly, to the Hamburger's amusement. They rest of us didn't need a translation.

We stayed at the hut for a couple of hours, reading and snoozing in its rag-tag front lawn with the enormously long lake stretching away in front of us, before taking the hour-long trek back to camp for dinner. (We had underestimated the distance from Framheim 10 to the hut.)

Framheim 11, we decided after some scouting by myself and Josh, would be on the soggy ground slightly beyond the hiker's hut, between the Gjevillvatnet lake and the sheer, stunning mountains to the north, with Okla across on the south bank. After dinner, with the sky gently clouding over and the air swiftly chilling after our two-day taste of summer, we hauled our gear slowly and achingly down the path.

Now, here we are. I am twenty, and the end of an unforgettable summer adventure is bounding closer day by day.

With the ferry option ruled out, tomorrow will be dedicated to marching twenty kilometres to Gjevillvatnet's west shore, from where we can easily bus to Oppdal on the 30th before heading to Trondheim.

I cannot tell how I feel about our time in the national parks nearly being over. No doubt, back in the bustling streets of Edinburgh, I will find myself longing for the sounds I hear now in Trollheimen.

Birds calling and trilling down the valley. A ripple of breeze in the tent flaps. The rush of a distant waterfall.

(00:40)



(About 03:00)

I was woken from a light sleep moments ago by a deep, distant roar. A ground-shakingly primeval bass resounded down the valley before echoing into memory.

I clambered over a conked-out Andy and peered out of the tent flap into a grey, quiet world. An avalanche? I couldn't see any hint of tumbling snow on the slopes either side of the lake. It must have happened deeper into the mountains, somewhere in the north, the sound resonating far across the national park as it slept.

Everything is quiet now.

I settle back into my sleeping bag with a shudder.

(About 03:05)

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Wed 1st July (Den Gode Nabo pub, Trondheim)



(19:05)

I am writing by candlelight in the ramshackle riverside confines of the Den Gode Nabo pub in Trondheim. What we have almost unanimously decided may be the best pub in the world.

It was one of our first stops when we arrived here on Monday night, having been recommended by a quirky English pub owner in the city centre who advised us to go to a “fookin’ greht lil place wif slanty wooden floors and roofs and candles ev’ywhere” instead of his own “tacky wee English poob.”

The pub owner was interested in “how the fook” we ended up here, and we likewise asked him how he had found himself owning a pub in central Norway. He told us that he had originally moved from England to Spain and opened a pub there, but fell in love with a Norwegian girl and felt the pull north. Now, he runs his pub and raises money for charities. He did St Olav’s Way, a pilgrim’s route from Trondheim to Oslo, on one particular fundraising venture, following a similar path to ourselves but in reverse.

That night, after a long-awaited pint or three at Den Gode Nabo, we slept in the open air on the wooded slopes below the Kristiansten fortress overlooking the old town. Last night, after a great if slightly dazed day in town, we took the tram to its furthest stop, Lian, a wooded lake in the hilly south-western suburbs, and camped comfortably on the shore before being awoken in the morning by heavy rain and a laughing, whooping school trip.

Tonight we’re expecting another relatively uncomfortable night, this time on the floor of the airport to the east.

Den Gode Nabo is filled with a pleasant hubbub as people arrive for dinner, but there is still plenty of space and calm music courses over us as we read and talk at our long table, hemmed in by bulging rucksacks.

Everything is cosy-brown and candle-light orange, pushing out the grey chill of the evening. It has drizzled all day, unlike yesterday – and yet, as Janos, Andy and I discussed earlier as we left the Natural History and Archaeology Museum and a medieval town exhibition, Trondheim is not ruined by oppressive weather. Oslo seemed miserable in the rain. Trondheim’s atmosphere is enhanced by it.

I’ll get around to a more comprehensive account of our departure from Trollheimen and unexpectedly early arrival in Trondheim in time. Our ridiculous hitchhiking adventure after Janos negotiated passage in the

packed truck of an eccentric farmer half-way along Gjevillvatnet; Our startlingly luxurious taxi ride and the barbed wit of the woman driving it; Our glazed-over wanders around this wonderfully peaceful city.

But for now, it's back to books and beer in the candlelight.

(19:29)

