

WOTAN'S LOG FOR DISTRIBUTION

16th August 2008

This log covers a fortnight's sailing along the Gulf of Finland from 24th July to 8th August. As usual, I must remind you that your computer has a delete key!

I arrived late in the afternoon of Friday 24th July from LHR and began work on the everlasting list of things to do. Soon tiring of this, I headed up to the "Sailors Restaurant" at the NJK only to bump into Max Ekholm, his lady friend Jane and her sister Fiona. We had a delightful evening swapping sailing stories. Max pointed out the drawing of his yacht Gefion, made by his father who designed it, in the entrance hall to the club. I had come armed with a copy of Arthur Ransome's First cruise of the Racundra, which described the library in the NJK. Sadly I could find no one who could open up the library for me.

In the morning I continued to work my way down the list of things to do, this time rather more successfully. I was stopped in my reverie by the appearance of Alison Garrett. Soon after I received a phone call from Yves Renard, the previous owner of Wotan, on his way from the airport. After everyone was settled in, we took the ferry over to the mainland for a drink at the Capelli a delightful turn of the century bar/restaurant on the main boulevard.

On Sunday morning we took the ferry across to Suomenlinna. We visited the WWII submarine before walking over to the central fortress. In the main square there was the tomb of the architect built in the classical Greek style and supported by the prow and stern of a Greek galley, with a hippolite's helmet laid in the top of the tomb. We set sail late in the afternoon for Långören a bay at the entrance to Esbo harbour surrounded by huttes and houses. It was not long before the owner of one of these houses came out in his motor launch to talk to us.

On Monday 28th July we set off for Tallinn. The wind was free enough to allow us to fetch Tallinn. We put in a reef and Wotan sped across the 50 miles to Tallinn in just over 7 hours in the most perfect conditions. We sailed into Pirita Olympic marina, which was built for the Moscow games. We were dropped by our taxi just outside the walls of Tallinn. We walked up the winding cobbled streets to the main square and spent a happy evening wandering around the old Hanseatic city, which was very badly damaged in WWII, but which had been well restored. We went to the Olde Hansa, a psuedo medieval restaurant, for dinner. The gent's loo was something quite special, for instead of a water tap, there was a kettle! The building was genuinely old with walls of undressed stone. We returned to Wotan by taxi rather than by ox cart, as perhaps we should have.

Yves and I spent most of Tuesday morning trying to book him a flight back to Paris, to attend his brother's funeral. Yves had heard on Sunday morning that his brother had sadly died during the night. When this was all sorted, we set off to the supermarket to restock Wotan's sorely depleted wine locker. It was 1400 before we were able to leave Pirita. Under a clear blue sky we set course for NJK Högholmen. We wound our way through the rocks into NJK Högholmen. Armed with Yves'

bottle of Charles Heidseick, we went to the NJK club room to savour the view and the champagne.

Under yet another clear blue sky, we followed the green route recommended for pleasure craft back to Helsinki. We anchored off Herro for lunch and entered Helsinki via the eastern entrance where there is a mobile crane from which punters bungee jump. After a particularly good dinner in the sailors' restaurant, we bade farewell to Yves, who had an early morning flight back to Paris.

On Thursday 31st July, Alison and I made a quick foray to the supermarket before setting off for NJK Kajholmen, which I had been told was the club's most beautiful anchorage. I had not bargained for a low bridge about 3 miles east of Helsinki. The chart confirmed that the bridge was indeed a swing bridge. The traffic lights and the control tower did tend to give the game away! Anyhow it was soon open and we motor sailed up the narrow green channel past the summer houses of the great and the good of Helsinki. We reached Kajholmen to be told by one of the instructors, that the harbour was closed because of the sailing camp. When we explained that we had come all the way from England, the instructor relented and allowed us to stay for the night. Later on that evening there was a treasure hunt for the kids, while others were paddling around in Optimists, boarding boats moored in the harbour and generally having a whale of a time.

In order to have a chance of getting through the Saimaa canal, we planned to meet up with Yves on Saturday in Kotka. We had 32 miles to cover to reach Svartholm a Swedish castle built in the 18th Century and largely demolished, as usual, by a Franco-British fleet during the Crimean war. I also planned to visit M Yachts, whom I hoped would be able to look after Wotan over the winter. We headed north east from Soderby towards Sundön, where we anchored on a little bay surrounded by reed beds. The channel ran between small islands, liberally furnished with huttes. Some serious squiggling was required to negotiate the channel. As we neared Lovisa the islands became bigger, the water more open and the scenery less attractive. We sailed past the Finnish nuclear power station and into the main shipping channel to Lovisa. Martin Rosenstedt, the Managing Director, welcomed us to his the pontoon. Martin, who was a shipwright, showed me around his yard and workshop. Then he came aboard Wotan to have a look around to see what had to be done. Over a cup of tea we shook on the deal. He kindly offered to help me bring Wotan back to Valko from Helsinki, if I did not have a crew. We then headed down to Svartholm for the night. After dinner we went for a walk around the fort to discover that when the Franco-British fleet demolished the fort, it had been deserted for several years! There was a live rock concert in full swing at the café, so we sat down with a beer and listened. Things had clearly improved over the last 150 odd years!

Yves was planning to arrive in Kotka early on Saturday evening, so we needed to be in Kotka to meet him. We decided to take the green route, past the nuclear power station on Hastholmen. The Finns generate about 75% of their power from nuclear. When the new nuclear power station they are building is completed, they will generate 100% of their power requirements from nuclear. We went into the tiny fishing harbour of Kaunissaari. Its entrance could only be described as interesting! I met the skipper of the Österjernan, a beautiful replica of a Baltic Trader of the same name, which had plied between Lovisa and Stockholm for many years, that had been built by public subscription and launched in 2006.

Kotka Yacht Club was celebrating its 120th anniversary. Its club house was, if it is possible, even more beautiful and certainly

larger than that of the NJK at Blekholmen. Alison and I had dinner in the bar, watching a television programme about drag tractor racing. The tractor was weighed down by a very heavy trailer and the race track was of mud. The winner was the tractor which went the furthest, in this case a mere 80.50m! The drivers dress up in motor racing overalls and flame proof balaclavas. I suppose if you can't be a Formula 1 racing driver, this is probably the next best thing!

Yves arrived at midday on Sunday 3rd August having been bumped of his Air France flight. He met me in the Café Segeli, which doubles up as the marina office. I was on the internet looking at the forecast. The forecast for Tuesday was horrid with 40 knot winds. I was beginning to get cold feet about going up the Saimaa Canal. There are strict rules that once you are in Russian waters you cannot deviate from the internationally approved route to the canal. We all decided that we should take a lay day in Lovisa and explore the Saimaa lake region by car rather than sailing up the canal. Even with Yves' fluent Russian, we did not want to take the risk of ending up on a Russian shore, looking down the barrel of an AK-47.

We set off in the morning for Lovisa. I decided that we should drop anchor for lunch between Gaddbirgsö and Lindholmen, just south of the nuclear power station. There appeared to be a deep, though relatively narrow channel. Suffice it to say we hit both sides of the channel, one on the way in and the other on the way out! Once we had left the main shipping channel and entered the channel up to Lovisa town marina, it became evident that the 2.7m channel was not as advertised. We dragged our keel through the mud for the last 1/2 mile to the marina. We tried to moor about 20m from the end of the pontoon and came to a grinding halt in the mud. A friendly yachtie pointed out that it was deeper at the end of the pontoon, where we finally managed to tie up. Nevertheless our echosounder was showing 1.9m rather than the 2.5m advertised in the marina guide. Wotan seemed to be curiously stable! The young harbour master, when I complained of the lack of depth, responded that it was "friendly mud". The area of Lovisa near the marina is made up of old wooden houses, whilst the centre of town boasts a number of very attractive Georgian style buildings. The city architect, one Elmer Badermann, had had the wit to preserve the town's old buildings from the ravages of the 1970's developers.

Tuesday morning turned out to be less overcast than I had expected but it was certainly blowing a good 25 knots from the east in the harbour. We had evidently made the right decision. National Car rental came up with the car promised and by 1045 we were off to Savonlinna. Yves took the first spell, which took us along the coast that we had just sailed, to Kotka and then north east up to Lapeenranta on the shores of lake Saimaa at the northern end of the Saimaa canal. We stopped for a burst of sightseeing and some coffee. The cathedral was built of wood and was very beautiful inside. We left Lapeenranta and headed off towards Ruokolahti. Outside Ruokolahti, we spotted a beautiful church which we stopped to look at. Just outside the church was a cemetery, we had seen a number of cemeteries and noticed that they were very well tended. Over the entrance was a memorial to those that had died in the Winter War of 1939-1940. Inside the cemetery there were 90 graves of soldiers who had died, most of whom were in their late teens, as is sadly usually the case. There was a wooden bell tower in the middle of the cemetery which had been built in 1652.

After lunch we drove on over the Puumala bridge, which we would have sailed under if we had made it to Savonlinna. We went off piste on the Rokansalo peninsular, driving on dirt roads. This gave a clue as

to why the Finns are such good rally drivers! We were able to stop off and wander along the shores of the lake. It was clear that Savonlinna was just too far, we would have arrived after the castle had closed, to be faced with a 150 mile drive back to Lovisa. We returned to Lovisa via Mikkeli and Kouvola.

Since we had had to drag Wotan's keel up to the marina, we were not a little apprehensive as to what might happen on the way out. I met the skipper of the Österjernan, who pointed out the water level gauge on the pontoon outside the harbour master's office. He said that the water was at or about standard level. Much relieved, I turned on the echo sounder to find that we had a depth of 2.5m. We were able to leave the pontoon and rejoin the main shipping channel with no difficulty. We headed west under motor as there was little or no wind. We anchored for lunch in Sunviken on the island of Sundön. After an indecently long lunch hour and sleep we weighed anchor at 1700 and set off for an anchorage on the south east corner of Havsudden. The anchorage was beautifully sheltered and very attractive.

Thursday 7th August Havsudden, Emsalö to NJK Blekholmen

On Thursday morning we weighed anchor and followed the green small boat channel to Helsinki. The wind was in the west so beating down the channel was not an option. Just after we passed through the narrow Kutusarkka channel, we bore off to anchor for lunch in the bay on the north east side of Villinge. Again this bay provided a wonderfully sheltered anchorage. We then headed towards the Hevossalmi bridge. We went into the marina just to the east of the bridge. The lady who ran the Esso fuel berth had been running it for 26 years. She had the most impressive blue rinse that you have ever seen. She clearly held a torch for Yves as she gave him a bar of chocolate. Yves explained that she talked German to us, thinking that she was talking English, which perhaps explained why I could not understand a word she said!

When, back at NJK Blekholmen, Alison told me that I needed to get myself dogged up, I realised that something was afoot. Yves had surreptitiously booked a table at the smart restaurant in the NJK clubhouse. We had a delicious dinner. There was a large table at the other end of the dinning room, eating crayfish and singing to the music of an accordion player.

Thus ended a delightful cruise of the Gulf of Finland.

Ant Fawcett
16th August 2008