

Stockholm to Helsinki

written by Marcus | 23 September, 2014



In Finland just over 74% of the land area is covered in forest. There are over 50,000 lakes longer than 200m (but no-one has actually counted them all) and the Finns love to swim in them. The population is around 5 million and there are 2 million saunas, roughly 1 per household. So it seemed unlikely we'd be able to avoid trees, cold water and sitting naked in a hot room.



Stockholm

16th to 22nd September 2014

The crossing from Stockholm was thankfully more successful than the maiden voyage of the Varsa that we had been to see earlier that day. Before leaving Sweden we'd also managed to solve the perennial problem of the English travelling abroad and found some proper tea bags after Stuart tipped us off about The English Shop which supplied all things British at reassuringly expensive prices. A good cup of tea at the beginning and end of each day is too important to begin worrying about the price though.



Proper tea makes for a happy Kirsty



The Varsa museum

We arrive in Turku as dawn breaks and have a couple of hours

to ride round the city centre. Finland is the most expensive country yet and we get charged 4 euros for a coffee. Our food bills are comfortably 15-20% more than even Denmark and Sweden too but maybe we're just eating more. Turku is 60 degrees north, roughly in line with Lerwick on the Shetland Islands, and marks the most northerly point of our whole trip, from here we can begin following the flocks of geese we've been seeing and start heading south.



Sailing into Turku at dawn

Through the power of Twitter, Taina has agreed to be our guide for the day and we meet her outside the impressive library (Finns love a good library). It's a lovely little city with the River Aura at its heart and Taina leads us on a gentle ride along the river bank to see parts of the old town, formerly Finland's capital. We pass a 'nap house' that offers weary travellers somewhere to catch 40 winks but it's closed, as is the adjacent sauna but there would be plenty of time to

find another one of those.



Taina our amazing Turku Guide

After a bite to eat and crossing the Aura on the iconic little Föri ferry that has been offering free transport for bikes and pedestrians for over 100 years we meet a reporter from the local paper that Taina had tipped off. It seems our story is news worthy so we get our photo taken, offer a few soundbites and are told it should be published the next day.



Daisy, Daisy in Turku

Turku sits on the South West corner of Finland where the coast is littered with some 40,000 islands forming a huge archipelago. We had been toying with the idea of venturing out onto some of the islands as there are a few marked cycle routes that form loops of varying lengths centred around Turku. In fact, for anyone looking for inspiration for a cycle tour of a week or more then this would be a very good place to come. Unfortunately some of the key ferry crossings we'd need to take stop operating at the end of August so we're left with the choice of the biggest loop, that would take a week or a short out and back route. We explain our dilemma to Taina and she immediately sways us towards the out and back route by suggesting we try and get to the most remote and southernmost inhabited island of them all: Utö. This would involve 65km of hopping across several islands, most with bridges between them but also a slightly longer crossing on a ferry before we get to the little port of Pärnäs. From Pärnäs it's a 4.5 hour

ferry that has to weave between hundreds of islands before eventually arriving at Utö, a rock out in the middle of the sea with just a handful of permanent residents and Finland's first lighthouse. We decided to go for it and ride some of the way that same day, camp, then ride into Pärnäs to catch the 2:00pm ferry to Utö the next day. Along the way we pick up a copy of the local paper and see we've made the front page! At Pärnäs a couple say they'd read about us that morning too but thought we were going to a different island? The reporter had written that we were off to one of the other islands in the archipelago which left us with images of bunting being hung out and a crowd gathering somewhere else only to find we never arrived.



First bridge onto the Archipelago



Tandemillia!

Unlike everything else in Finland, the 4.5 hour ferry crossing is remarkably good value, better even than our previous

favourite ferry company Caledonian MacBrane in Scotland, as it is completely free. The boat is 'crowded' with twitchers keen to spot a sea eagle or cormorant but apparently the most exciting thing on display that day is a kestrel. For us though it's a fantastic way to experience the archipelago with so many different islands, some with houses, huts, windmills and boat houses but most are uninhabited. It would be a great place for a kayaking trip.



Jurno

Eventually we land at Utö at 6:30pm and we extract the bike from the ferry through an awkward side door as the jetty is too high to allow the main door to open. We could have had it craned off but decided against it. It's not a big island by anyone's standards but we still get lost trying to get to the lighthouse and luckily a friendly resident comes to our help and hands us a map. He used to live there but is now just visiting to help his son with a building project and to enjoy the unusually warm weather. He tells us it's a very unique place, especially when a storm hits and we should stay a bit

longer than just the overnight stop we'd planned. But at the moment it's turning into a beautiful clear evening so we make our way up to the lighthouse to cook dinner and watch the sun set. There is a waterside sauna that could have ended the day nicely but it's only for guests of the only hotel on the island and besides there would be plenty of time for that later.





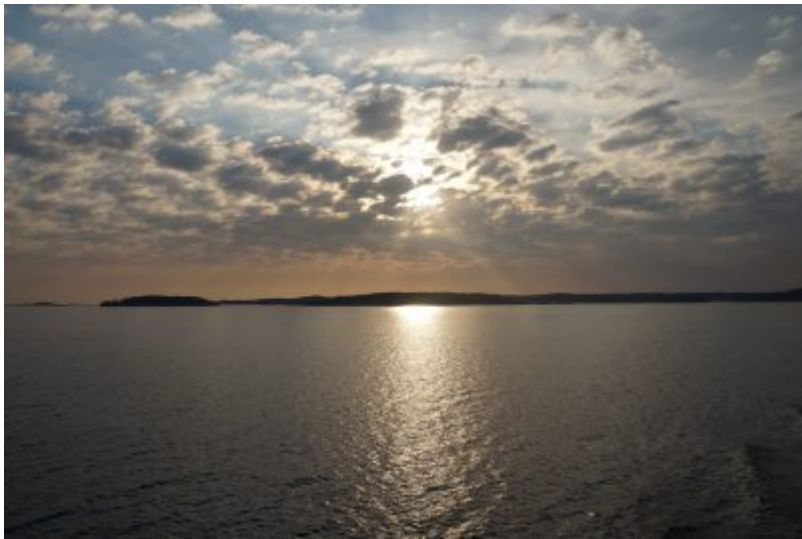
The ferry timetable is a bit awkward to say the least as the

return trip is at 5:30am the next day. It barely seems worthwhile putting up the tent, so we don't. Instead we turn the cosy little ferry waiting room into our own 'nap house' and get a few hours sleep before climbing back onto the boat.



MV Eivor

The advantage of the early start is that we get to see a great display of stars given the sky is still clear, followed by sunrise over the islands. Thank you Taina for this superb and very memorable suggestion.



Retracing our steps up the archipelago is nice and easy. The only traffic passes as a small convoy shortly after a ferry arrives at either end of the island so mostly the road is quiet. One of the ferry crew coming back from Utö had asked if we'd swum while we were there but regretfully we have to admit we didn't. I make amends the following night when we camp next

to a swimming beach and join some locals by taking in a lap of the floating pontoon. 'It's not so cold at the moment' one of them tells us. It's not so warm either.



Kaarina swimming pontoon in morning mist

There is only one route option heading east without making a large detour, which is to follow the 110 main road. It's long, straight and has plenty of steady climbs followed by steady descents where our terminal velocity is always 52 km/hr. There are a few lakes on either side but 74% of the time they are hidden from view by trees. An uninspiring day ends suitably with a struggle to find a camping spot, half a pan of quinoa being spilt and a peg going missing in the undergrowth.

But the next day starts much better as the prodigal peg makes a return and the fog that had been quite thick on previous mornings soon lifts. There's just 20km left to ride on the 110 before we get to turn left onto a much more pleasant side

road. The climbs are tougher but the views much nicer. Harvesting finished a while ago so the farmers are now busy burning stubble and ploughing. Finland is supplied with the same shade of red paint as Sweden for their barns but, controversially, some of them aren't painted at all.



Our next destination is another tip from Taina, the Nuuksio National Park which is just 40km from Helsinki. Getting there proves interesting as we approach from the north west whereas the main entrance is on the south east corner. As such we have to negotiate some gravel roads and then some mountain bike trails to get in. The granny ring has to be deployed having been kept clean since the very beginning of the trip to get up some challenging loose climbs. But it's worth it when we arrive at one of the designated free camping spots in the park, right next to lake Haukalampi. It's very well equipped with a covered cooking area, a shed full of logs for a fire and an axe to chop them. It's been a warm day so we cool off

in the lake then spend the evening round a fire wishing we'd bought marshmallows. We were a day late for the park's Saturday sauna but there was still a couple of days left in Finland to find another one.





Then our luck with the weather changes. There are lots of marked walking paths in the park so the next morning we head out on foot into the woods. After about an hour the light drizzle turns to heavy rain and we get a good soaking. We just about manage to spot a flying squirrel, or at least hear it land above us and see a tail disappearing when we look up. After sheltering for lunch the rain is still pouring so we dig out the wet weather gear and make for Helsinki. We're very glad when we arrive at Antero's flat, our host for the evening, and within minutes of entering the front door he's let us have a warm shower, put clothes in the wash, and begins cooking food. An amazing reception for two bedraggled strangers. And his house is equipped with a sauna! Which is offered to dry our clothes.

Antero tells us about his own cycle trip from Copenhagen to Helsinki, the other way round the Baltic from us, and I admire his extensive vinyl collection while Kirsty plays with the cats.



Antero, our host and guide in Helsinki

The next day he kindly offers to guide us into the city centre despite it adding 10km to his commute which is invaluable as

he knows a great path alongside the river that avoids most of the traffic. It's stopped raining but the temperature has dropped to 3 degrees, a full 20 degrees less than 2 days ago. All the clothes that we've been lugging about that seemed unnecessary now come out of the panniers and become very necessary.



Helsinki Cathedral



Helsinki Cathedral

Helsinki is an interesting town though not quite as striking as some of the other cities we've been through. There is a slightly soviet feel to the architecture probably helped by the biting wind and big statues of important looking men with very important looking moustaches. Unusually there are big chunks of rock nestled between some buildings, one of which has been blasted out and turned into a very impressive church. After a good look around the city and a trip to the Olympic stadium it's time to catch a ferry to Tallinn and into our 9th country. Looks like the famous Finnish sauna experience will have to wait until another visit.









Copenhagen to Stockholm

written by Marcus | 23 September, 2014



The standard response when anyone noticed our route took in Sweden was to adopt the international sign of being cold by wrapping both arms across the chest and making a brrrr sound. So when we stepped out of the train just outside Malmö we were ready to brace ourselves against the Arctic winds. But of course it was sunny and a pleasant 25 degrees, as it had been for most of the trip so far, so it seems that the Swedes may be getting their definition of a British Summer that the cyclist near Hamburg had told us about. At some stage our luck has to change but until then we'll keep slapping on the suncream and enjoy riding in shorts and short sleeves.



Church of Oscar, near Malmö

6th to 15th September 2014

Out of Malmö we decide to keep navigation simple with a plan

to follow the coast and keep the sea to our right for the next few days. It makes for some excellent riding passing numerous small villages and sandy beaches. Seaside camping allows for a bit more swimming and on the first evening a passerby asks me if it was OK swimming at that beach. It was very refreshing but he says that when the wind blows from the east the water looks dirty, from the west it is clear. He leaves with a cheery 'Good Luck!' but fortunately the next day my hair hasn't fallen out and I manage to hold down my breakfast. Clearly a local myth to scare off the smelly cycle tourists.



Morning fisihermen at Borby Strand



Along the way we find Ale's Stennar, an ancient arrangement of stones that forms the shape of a boat but also acts as a calendar to mark the various solar phases. It seems propping up stones has been a popular pastime across the globe for thousands of years and there are sure to be many more to be seen on our trip.



Ale's Stennar

There are a few more hills than in Denmark, some may even be higher than the summit at Mons Klint. On one day we descended for a while off a main road towards a quiet beach for lunch just outside Kivik. We didn't mind the detour as our map (we picked up some free ones from the Tourist Info Office in the end) showed a small road that would allow us to loop back up to the main road avoiding having to climb the hill we'd come down. But when we got there a sign said the road was closed when the military were using the land for target practice, like at 2:30 on Monday 8th September. So back up the hill, very slowly as a herd of sheep were being shepherded up the road by a lady and 2 dogs. We heard plenty of gun fire and some fairly heavy ordinance later in the day so probably best that we didn't squeeze past the road closed sign. We meet a few more road closed signs during the course of the week forcing us to double back so it seems Sweden has a lot of military land and their army get a lot of shooting practice.



Swedish Gravel (G) Road



There are a variety of A roads and B roads in Sweden but also some we've come to call G roads. Partly because the Garmin is fond of sending us down them but mainly because they are hard packed gravel instead of being paved. Most are fine to ride on but we did find a couple that degraded into not much more than rocky forest double track. It's not easy keeping the tandem in a straight line when it's bouncing between rocks and roots but thankfully these sections are relatively short and it's a relief when we get back onto smooth tarmac.

The main E22 road has also been following us round the coast and we keep having to pass under it or climb over it to try and stay on the quiet lanes. By Ronneby, after 4 days of sunshine the day degrades into a British definition of a British summer with frequent showers, some quite heavy. Along with battling to stay off the E22 this forces the decision to turn north away from the coast and we find ourselves riding through an enormous forest. There are a few G road diversions

but mostly the road is smooth and straight and flanked with tall pine trees. There are also mushrooms in all shapes, sizes and colours everywhere. Apparently some are very tasty and many Swedes enjoy foraging at this time of year but our fungal knowledge is far too limited to know which ones are good, bad or magic so we decide not to put any in the cooking pot that evening. Kirsty did find some wild blueberries though. We spend the night pitched between some derelict cabins, one of which has somehow been split clean in two and would make a good setting for a horror film.



Spooky Cabin



Can we eat these?

Since leaving the coast we'd plotted a route towards the town of Kalmar where we had arranged to stay with Andreas, a Warm

Showers host. Other than it being a convenient place to stop that day we knew nothing about the place so it's a welcome surprise to find it's home to the finest Renaissance castle in Scandinavia which makes for a picturesque backdrop for lunch.



Kalmar Castle



Entering Kalmar Castle

Andreas is a great host serving up a delicious ice cream cake and claims to have eaten 4.5 litres of ice cream in one sitting. Perhaps an appetite to rival my own? He's ridden extensively in North America and Europe including some time using an Eliptigo but prefers not to plan too much in advance. In fact he tends to upsticks and saddle up at a moments notice whenever he feels the need for a change of scenery. Dinner is washed down with some Flat Tyre ale which is appropriate as we'd had a pinch flat just 500m from Andreas' front door after attempting to ride up a particularly high kerb at a particularly optimistic speed.





Alongside Kalmar sits the island of Öland and we would have liked to have crossed onto it and ridden to the top. Unfortunately the ferry that you can take from the top back to

the mainland stops running in August so instead we plan to ride up the coast a bit further.

After a belly full of pancakes for breakfast accompanied by a soundtrack by Pink Floyd (Andreas had a great 60s & 70s music collection) we again put our trust in the Garmin to try and help us avoid the hard shoulder of the E22. It comes up trumps and leads us onto one of the best roads of the trip so far. We ride through a much more varied woodland with pine and deciduous trees on a small quiet road with sweeping bends and shallow rises. There are lots of little wooden houses painted the ubiquitous shade of red that we've seen all over Scandinavia. It must save a lot of time when choosing your paint in the local DIY stores. Once again the sun is out and the Swedish definition of a British Summer returns.

By mid afternoon we've reached our destination, the port town of Oskarshamn where we buy tickets for the ferry to the island of Gotland, a sizeable lump of rock out in the Baltic Sea being 800km long and 50km wide. It's a popular destination with holidaymakers in the summer but also has a thriving agricultural community with sheep farming being very common and as such the Gotland flag is a picture of a sheep. There is the usual confusion over why we need two passenger tickets but only have one bicycle and then we're asked if we're taking part in the cycle race while we're on Gotland? It's the weekend of the annual Gotland 360 Cycle Sportive, a 360 km circular ride ridden over the course of two days and limited to just 360 participants. It sounded worth investigating.



Signpost in Swedish Mils (about 10km). Not to be confused with a mile.

The ferry is a late crossing and just before we reach the island I'm woken from a light snooze by someone carrying out

the most annoying activity of modern times: scrolling through the different ringtones on a mobile phone. After listening to them all 3 times she correctly identifies the one that sounds like someone whistling as being the most irritating and seems happy that this is the one for her. We're then turfed out of the ferry at 11:15pm, ride 1km up a hill to the first available patch of grass, set up the tent and crawl inside.



Gotland 360 container

The plan for the next day is to follow the well sign posted route of the Gotland 360 Cycle Sportive and so we watch the group of riders go past and intend to loiter a bit longer before setting off at a gentle pace some way behind. It's a very mixed group of riders with lots in club jerseys but all ages and a good mix of men and women. It looks more like the start of an Audax than the typical heads-down-don't-smile appearance of a UK sportive. As the last rider comes round the bend they are closely followed by three vans who are diligently collecting all the route signs as they go and erasing our planned route in the process.

Time for a Plan B which is to pick a point on the other side of the island and meander over there. Along the way we find some of the Sportive route signs so Plan C is formed and we try to follow the route in reverse. This proves quite difficult as the signs are not easy to spot approaching from the wrong direction at each turning so over a cappuccino in a town called Roma we decide to revert to Plan B(ii) and point back towards the other side of the island.



Ducks for sale at Kracklingbö market

The road we're on should be quiet being away from the larger towns but today there is a lot of traffic and when we run into the back of a long queue we find out why. Today is market day in Kracklingbö and it looks to be very popular so we stop to take a look. The stalls are selling lots of local produce including Gotland honey, Gotland cheese, Gotland bread and Gotland tomatoes (the stall holder tells us they are the best tomatoes on the island). We are encouraged to try samples of each and are far too polite to decline. One particular cake, a Ljus Kladdkaka (Light gooey cake) is too good to miss so we

buy a whole one to fuel us for the rest of the day.



A game of Varpa

There is also a Varpa tournament taking place which is an old Viking game that still survives on Gotland. This appears to be a much more physical version of boules or lawn bowls where participants hurl a metal discus with surprising accuracy at a small wooden peg. There's not a single blazer between them.

By mid afternoon we've made it to the other side of the island and are now faced with a t-junction. Turn left and investigate the small town of Ljugarn or turn right and begin heading back into the middle of the island. We decide to turn left and the result which proves to be a very good decision.



Gotland Lambs



Gotland Lambs



Gotland Lamb

By chance Ljugarn is the midway point of the Gotland 360 and when we roll into town we stop at the checkpoint to say hello.

Even the best prepared sportive rider is unlikely to be carrying as much stuff as we are but they ask us for our number so that we can be checked in all the same. When we explain that we're not part of the race but have ridden there from the UK we are offered a t-shirt each and an invitation to the riders' party that evening. As well as being a cycling challenge the Gotland 360 is also something of a gastronomic event and showcases some of the delicious food that the island has to offer so the spread at the party is excellent and like any good cycle event, there's plenty of it. We enjoy a feast of roast Gotland lamb, Gotland cheese, gooey cake and washed down with Gotland brewery ale. We just about manage to stay awake to listen to a few songs by ÖverRock before retiring to our tent having eaten far more than the 80km we'd ridden that day justifies but there's no harm in being in calorie credit when cycle touring.



Visby Cathedral

Crossing back to the east coast of the island the next day we enjoy a strong tail wind which the Gotland 360 riders had been complaining about having to ride straight into the previous day. There's time for a long stroll around the medieval town of Visby before a quick, quay-side cook up and then onto the ferry heading towards Nynahamn. Once again it's a late crossing so after a hour riding around in the dark looking for somewhere to pitch the tent we eventually discover a campsite and find a secluded corner.



If you like meat and you like cheese, you'll love squeezezy meaty cheese!

From Nynahamn it's 60km North to Stockholm (skirting round more military target practice) where we find our host for the evening, Stuart, who is a former colleague of Kirsty's . I discover that drinking from a bottle that a wasp is already occupying is not a good idea as it results in a fat lip.

Kirsty also discovers that me drinking from a bottle that a wasp is occupying is not a good idea as she gets the contents of the bottle thrown over her in my panic. We now have a day to explore Stockholm and see if much has changed since we last here about 6 years ago then tonight we get to enjoy what Viking Line call a 'mini cruise' to Turku in Finland. At €20 each for the 11 hour journey we're not expecting it to be the QE2.

Lübeck to Copenhagen

written by Marcus | 23 September, 2014



30th August to 5th September 2014

Like Jenson Button, having the right tyres is critical for a touring cyclist and in Lubeck it was time for a pit stop. Although the Schwalbe Marathon Mondials that we'd fitted should be good for at least 10,000km and we'd only used them for a 1/10 of that they were causing us a few problems. The Mondials are the tyre of choice for most 'Adventure' cyclists being as tough as old boots and probably made from a few pairs. They can cope with any terrain, are as good as p*ncture proof and can be relied on in the harshest conditions. However they roll like a pair of John Dear tractor tyres when on smooth tarmac and were a very close fit in our frame, which could be an issue when we hit unpaved roads. Eric at the bike shop in Amsterdam had spotted the tyre/frame issue and recommended a different model of Schwalbe Marathon (of which there seem to be hundreds), the Supremes which had also been suggested by our fellow tandem touring friend Dr Boyd (see tandemasia.wordpress.com for tales of his travels).



Also on the shopping list was another seat post for Kirsty, the 4th so far of the trip. The temporary bodge using the donated suspension post was holding but we wanted something more reliable. Ideally a suspension post called a Thudbuster by an American manufacturer called Cane Creek but in a less popular model type and in a very unusual size that very few bike manufacturers use (27mm for the bike geeks). The chances of finding this were slim to nothing so my confidence was low when we walked into the local German bike emporium only to find precisely the seat post we wanted sat on the shelf. Surely not? We double checked the specs and it was indeed the right one. They also had one of the tyres we wanted and round the corner another shop had a second one. We should have bought a lotto ticket at the same time. The cost for this rarity amongst bike parts to provide all day comfort for my stoker?...priceless.



With the new parts fitted, including the USB charger we'd

bought in Amsterdam, by Sunday morning we were ready to hit the road again and a belly full of pancakes courtesy of Doerte sets us up for the day.

Straight away the new tyres make themselves known, by being so quiet. All that energy we'd wasted generating a loud roar with the old tyres has been replaced by forward motion and a gentle hum. It's like moving from Crunchy Sun Pat peanut butter to smooth churned Kerry Gold. Kirsty's new seat post is busily busting the thuds and the USB charger is taking power from the hub and squeezing it into our phones. A happy tandem crew. Apart from the few rain showers that keep our jackets in place.

After crossing the narrow bike path on the bridge to the island of Fehmarn we find a camp spot by a beach in a place called Gold. Just need to find Purple now.



Sunset at Gold. Always remember your soul.

Next day we roll onto the ferry to Denmark at Puttgarden.

Joining us on the boat is a full size train as the ferry crossing forms part of the Hamburg to Copenhagen route. It's extraordinary to watch it drive onto the boat, which hardly seems long enough. On the other side it's nice to be in a new country with a new currency and the promise of the finest pastry products in the world (even the ones on the ferry were good).



The train from Hamburg being loaded onto the ferry.



A long vehicle on the ferry to Denmark. And a train.

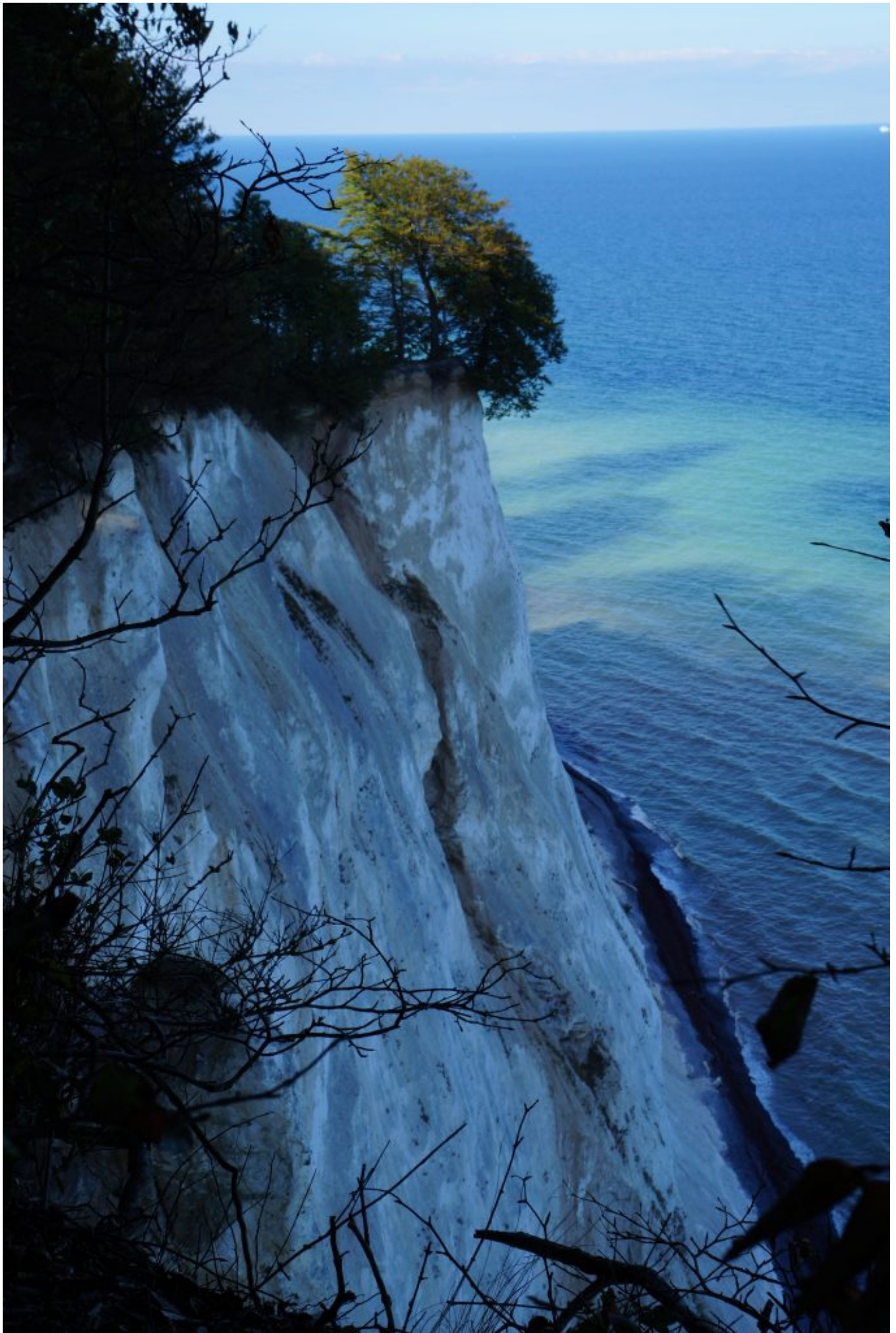
We stop in Rodbyhaven for supplies and decide to pay the library a visit to borrow some internet and look at some maps. While waiting for it to open we get chatting to Henrik who gives us an insight into Danish culture. Apparently Danes are notoriously intolerant but good at building bridges. He's studying Neuro-linguistic Programming and must have used some of this mind trickery to convince us to visit Moens Klint despite it being well off our route to Copenhagen.

On the way to Moens Klint, known for its hills and white cliffs, we get to sample some of the famous Danish bridge building including one that is 3.5km long as we cross onto 5 different islands, each with a slightly different character. Thankfully, gone are the endless maize fields that we seemed to have been riding through since the Netherlands and the landscape is much more open and rolling. We get to the visitor centre in the heart of the forest at the end of the island of

Mons after a few short sharp climbs ending in a long drag up a forest track. Ditching the bike we investigate the white cliffs on foot and they are impressive at 128m high and with a superbly constructed staircase (Kirsty counted 494 steps) down to the beach.







The White Cliffs of Moens Clint

But we need to get higher so we get back on the bike and continue up the forest track. Clicking down a few gears the track ramps up a bit and turns right and narrows. A left turn and we're onto a more rocky path with a few roots and still climbing. Single track now. Eventually we emerge from the woods onto a grassy hill top with the whole of Denmark laid out beneath us. We had ridden to the summit of the highest point in the entire country at a lofty 143m above sea level.



The highest point in Denmark

We had planned to use a Natur Kamp site in the woods that night but it doesn't seem to exist so we opt for a cliff top spot instead and plan to leave early before the park rangers can find us. Across Denmark there are hundreds of Natur Kamp sites that offer varying levels of shelter and facilities for cyclists, walkers and kayakers for free. The night before we'd

used one in the village of Guldborg that consisted of some open wooden huts and picnic tables with the marina opposite allowing us to use their facilities.



Free campsite with en suite playground



Decisions, decisions

When your ride begins at the highest point in a country there's only one way to go and the next morning we enjoy getting up to speed on a lovely stretch of downhill gradient. The wind turbines have turned in our favour too. In Stege we take on some delicious pastries then back over the bridge onto Zealand to turn north towards Copenhagen. Ever since Germany we'd got used to being on separate bike paths on main roads but this part of Denmark seems to be lacking much bike specific infrastructure save for a few route signs. Even though it's not that busy, certainly by UK standards, and there is a small shoulder for us to ride on we still feel a bit exposed and after lunch turn on 'main road avoidance' on the Garmin to find a more scenic route. It's much more pleasant and there are plenty of pretty thatched cottages and neat farms. In order to enforce stereotypes in one village we see a crocodile of school children being led by their teacher, every single one with blonde hair.



Zealand beach sheep

We camp near a beach near Koge in Zealand (just got to head to the new bit now) and I'm watched by some curious sheep during a dip in the Baltic sea in the morning. As well as libraries, we've found McDonald's to be good places to find free Wi-Fi so we stop off at one to check for emails. During the past few days we've been trying to set up Warm Showers or Couch Surfing hosts for Copenhagen but it seems that it's a very popular city with cycle tourists so everyone has either got guests already or is not available. The next option is Air B'n'B which we'd not tried before. For those unfamiliar with this website, it allows you to rent out a spare room, a vacant flat or even a whole house very easily and for as short a time as you like on your own terms and at your chosen price. It's a great idea as for the traveller you can stay somewhere nice often for a lot less than a hotel while the host is earning some cash from a room they aren't using. Again a flurry of requests to hosts from an internet connection at the Golden

Arches and this time within minutes we have a reply. Troels is a student who is out of town for the night and says we can use his room. For nearly half the price of 2 dorm rooms in the downtown hostel we now have a double room with secure storage for the bike within a few S-Train stops of Copenhagen city centre.



Bike friendly train



Inside the bike friendly train

I'd been looking forward to visiting Copenhagen having heard from friends how it has a nice 'feel' to it. It Always

interesting to see how every single city in the world develops a unique character and Copenhagen's seems quite relaxed but busy, plenty of historic architecture alongside cutting edge modern designs. It's also a 'bike city' edging Amsterdam as reportedly the best in the world for cyclists. Like Amsterdam there are traffic free bike lanes on every single road with bike specific traffic lights and cyclists having priority at side roads. Unlike Amsterdam though, the thousands of bikes parked everywhere seem to be less shonky, most being fairly new and quite a few trendy fixies with carefully selected components. It's also noticeable that lots of people wear helmets (usually the bowling ball shape variety) which we didn't see in The Netherlands.



Stupid smart bike



We decide to see the city using their City Bike Hire scheme. The brand new fleet of bikes were introduced just last year amid controversy and make Boris Bikes look like something from Victorian times. On the bars you get a tablet computer with full GPS navigation, info about the city and social networking. The bikes have integrated lights and an electric motor but if you activate the motor you pay an extra KR5.

Once we've found some available bikes, we log into the computer and release them from the docking station. Mine immediately tells me that it isn't undocked even though it clearly is so I park it again. I then log on again and pull it out but it still has a problem so I use the tablet computer to send an email to the City Bike HQ that the bike appears to have an error. The tablet then throws up an operating system error, re-boots and appears to be happy for me to carry on. Next step is to plug in our destination and The Little Mermaid seems an obvious choice but it's never heard of it. Abandoning the navigation we choose to just ride round a bit instead and good grief it's hard work! The bikes weigh 30kg so even the slightest slope is a struggle. They make riding a Boris Bike feel like a carbon fibre race machine. We should have activated the electric motor as this is clearly the only way to ride them but instead we give up and find the next available docking station only to find we've been riding for 1hr 2 minutes so pay for 2 hours. It's fair to say I'm not happy and rant and rave for a bit before we head off to find a bakery. [A day or two later we get an email apologising for the error while undocking the bike and refunding the fees, so maybe the scheme isn't so bad afterall]

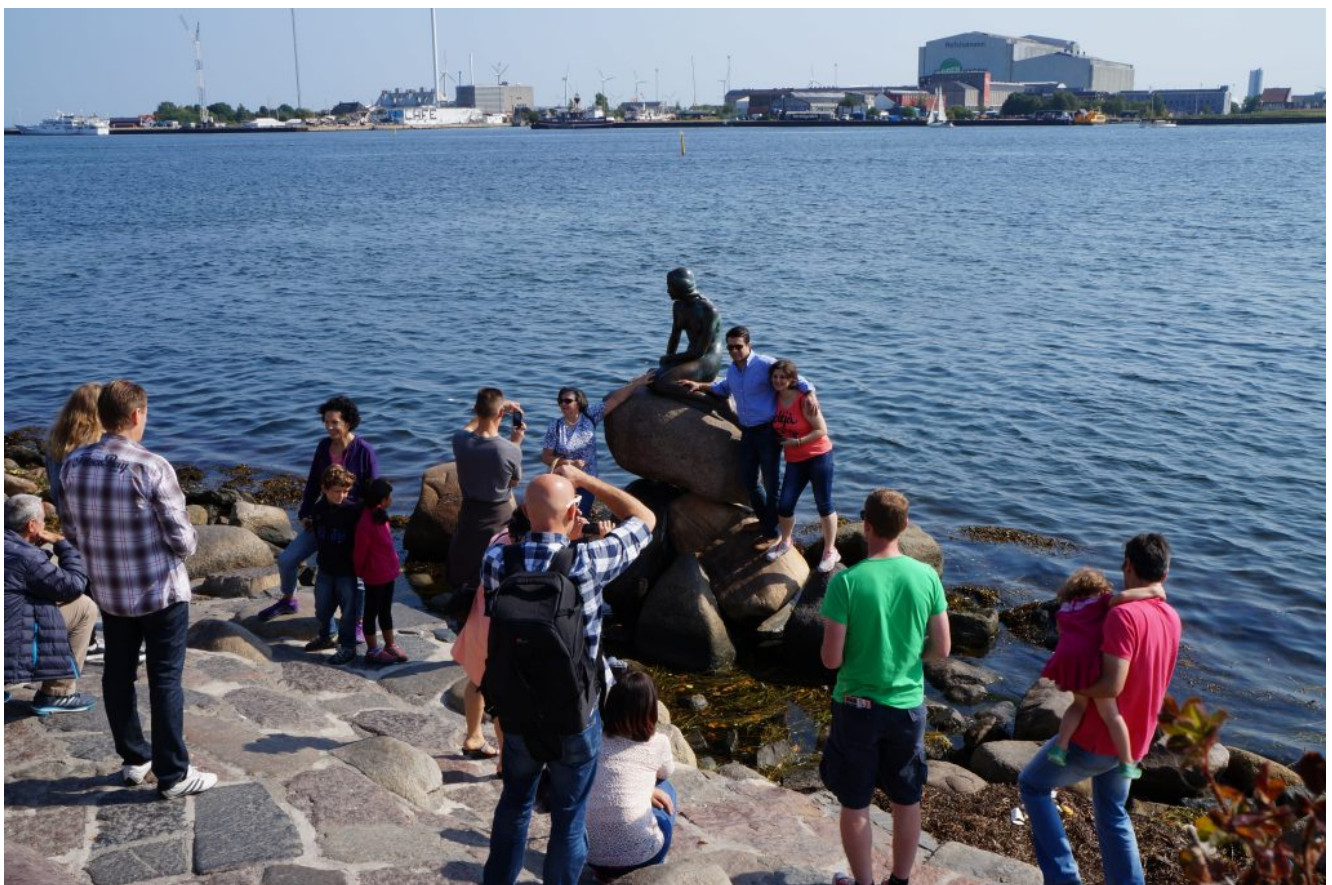


Colourful Copenhagen





Gig rowers passing the most expensive opera house ever built.



Little Mermaid photo op





Nyhavn

The rest of our time in Copenhagen is a real pleasure. We see the statue sat on the rock, visit Christiania a free thinking 'free town' where they set their own rules (no cars, no hard drugs) but ask you kindly not to take photos of the shady transactions taking place behind camo curtains. We find a street food cafe that prices it's buffet by the weight of the plate of food that you take. Normally we'd decide what to eat based on maximum calories to the Euro/Pound/Krone/Dollar but now have to factor in calories per gram per Krone. I decide that one large, heavy meatball and a portion of lasagne is better value than a stacked plate of lettuce and we leave happy and full.



Entering Christiana with the spiral staircase of the Church of our Saviour beyond

There are a few church towers that you can climb for a view of the city and we choose the Church of our Saviour. It's a bit unusual as the staircase wraps around the outside of the steeple which climbs to 90m high. The views are excellent from the top but I discover that I'm no Fred Dibnah when it comes to scaling the outside of a church spire and get a bit shaky legged when the steps get very narrow and very high up near the top. Usually Kirsty is more nervous than me with heights but she seems to be fine with it so maybe a career in steeplejacking could be an option for her when we get back. Once back on terra firma we head off to find a bakery to buy a pastry.



Don't look down



Next day we're tempted to join Troels at the Danish Kebab Championships but instead decide to head to Sweden and we plan to take the train across the bridge to Malmo. Unfortunately there is no cycle path on this, the longest road and rail bridge in Europe but there is talk that they may be building one above the road. On the way to the station we stop at a map shop but they are out of stock of the one we need for south Sweden. They do have some excellent maps of the Sverigeleden cycle network but each one only covers a small area and we'd need a pannier full to cover our entire route. Clearly not intended for the long distance cyclist. We resort to trying to find one in Sweden and spend our last remaining Krone on some pastries and catch the train to country number 7.