



Rescue from Lysefjord

Tim Good describes his lucky rescue of two young German adventurers who were completely stranded in a Norwegian fjord

Ten months had passed since returning from Norway and we received a hand-written letter with a German postage stamp, the envelope, creatively made from a Norwegian tourist brochure...

'Since the day you picked us up in your boat we experienced a good time in Norway. In this case I have to thank you first for this crazy action. I don't think anyone else would have helped us!'

Let me go back to March of 2018. We sailed from Liverpool, across to Ireland, up to Scotland, through the Caledonian Canal, and then over to Norway via Shetland. Our landfall was Ålesund, a delightful town within a day's sail of the Sunnmøre Alps, famed for their remote snowcapped peaks. We spent a month skiing directly from the boat in 'sea to summit' assaults, one of my most satisfying and exhilarating cruising

experiences. In late May we cruised north, winding our way through the continual archipelago that makes the Norwegian west coast, to the spectacular Lofoten Islands for the remainder of summer.

It was now August, and we'd sailed on a good northerly right down to Stavanger. As a finale to end our time in Norway, and before crossing the North Sea back home, we sailed up the iconic Lysefjord with its towering cliffs and waterfalls. End to end,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tim Good and Emmie Van Biervliet are in the middle of a circumnavigation. Tim runs a padlock supply company and Emmie is a well known travelling artist. Follow them at chasing-contours.com

this body of water measures 42km (26 miles) with rocky walls falling nearly vertically over 1,000m (3,300ft) into the water. Not only is the fjord long and narrow, it is in places as deep as the mountains are high. Like many of the hundreds of fjords in Norway, Lysefjord was carved by the action of glaciers and then flooded by the sea when the glaciers retreated.

We were sailing steadily, close hauled, with dramatic cliffs on either side. The fjord was nearly 2km across in places, and we hadn't seen another boat that day. There were no roads or tracks on the entire shoreline of Lysefjord. By chance I spotted a tiny flash of orange against the dark green and grey of the shore. Emmie looked through the binoculars: 'There appear to be two men on a rock waving something orange!' she said.

We deliberated for a moment. We knew of no bull fighting rings or ancient Norwegian traditions that involved dancing around with an orange flag. This must be a distress signal. We stowed the sails and motored in their direction. Quietly, I hoped this wouldn't be serious or take too much time; we were in some haste to make our way to Kvitsoy by sundown, a perfect staging post to catch



Shadowfax in iconic Lysefjord with its towering cliffs and waterfalls

‘They realised their mistake: there was no way back for them and they had no supplies’

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a weather window back across the North Sea the following day.

Closing in on their position, there stood two young men on a rock, looking quite desolate. Above them was thick forest leading up to vertical cliffs thousands of feet tall. It transpired they'd been trekking on unmarked routes in an attempt to reach Flørli, a small village reached only by boat – and from where we'd departed that morning. They had no GPS or maps and descended down to the shore about five miles too early. They realised their mistake after climbing down steep ravines and having to abseil in parts, pulling their rope after them. There was no way back for them and they had no food supplies.

A challenge

But how were these guys going to get aboard? *Shadowfax*, is a 17-tonne heavily built Seastream 43 and wouldn't take kindly to rocks. The wind was picking up and now blowing about 20 knots, funnelling down the fjord as it often does. Our dingy was deflated and stowed, ready for our North Sea crossing.

After a few minutes we decided the only option was for them to swim to the boat – they were young and strong German lads after all. We'd console them with hot tea once on board. Perhaps it was how forbidding and cold the water looked or perhaps I thought Emmie was taking too much pleasure in watching two strapping lads strip down to their underwear, but either way I conveniently remembered we had a set of bow ladders that we'd barely ever used – the type you'd use a lot in the Med when going bow-first to a harbour wall.

The bow on *Shadowfax* has a good overhang and I thought this might work. We could potentially bring the boat close to the rock allowing them to climb onto the short ladders. So the semi-clad young men were now instructed to get dressed and be ready.

I carefully approached the rock while Emmie visually checked the depth from the bow, trying to make out any boulders among the dark waters. The cliffs descend into the water at the same angle as they enter and the depth sounder was still recording 50m just 10m from the shore. For this to work the bow at the waterline had to be only 1-2ft from the rock so the ladders overhung sufficiently to board safely.

First, Jona – as we were soon to know him – agilely threw himself up the ladders before I quickly reversed away from the rock to repeat the process with Richard. I wanted to keep the boat in a stationary position for as little time as possible in an effort to avoid the wind blowing us sideways onto the shore. It was a delicate



exercise which took four attempts to get them and their bags on board safely.

The two young men had quickly gone from a serious situation to being served hot tea and biscuits on board a yacht. You may think I'm exaggerating when I say their situation was 'serious'. However, we saw very few boats those two days in Lysefjord and those that we did see were on the other side of the fjord, photographing the famous waterfalls, over a mile away from their position.

It was by pure chance we spotted their rucksack cover, and with no phone reception in these deep fjords they could have easily spent another few days or more out there without being spotted.

Instead we were able to continue on our way and drop them off at a small village at the entrance to the Fjord.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The lessons for this come more from Jona and Richard. However, there are significant similarities between sailing and hiking off the beaten track.
- In the wilderness carry something which is highly visible. It really works in an emergency.
- If you have a smart phone, you also have a GPS unit, but you need to know how to use it with apps such as Maps.me or ViewRanger and you must download your maps beforehand while you have wifi or signal.
- Consider a laser flare when walking in the wilderness. Even better, take your PLB from the boat when walking off trail. They work on land too.
- Have a contact that expects a call when you arrive somewhere safely.
- Pack high-energy snack bars as well as your planned meals.