

## 020614 Skagen

Several weekends ago, my friend Isabelle asked Micah and me if we would like to go to Skagen with her for a long weekend. The offer was quite attractive since Skagen is a famous city in Denmark and Isabelle was planning to drive which would make the travel quite easy. Skagen is located at the very tip of Denmark where the peninsula of Jutland points northward towards Oslo. It is the meeting place of two seas, the Baltic and the North and you can watch waves crash onto the point from two directions. The warm, beautiful weather beckoned, but I could not leave on Thursday with the others due to course work, so instead I planned to take the train and meet them in Fredrikshavn which is 20 km south of Skagen.

Most everywhere in Denmark is accessible by some sort of public transportation, which is how people can easily commute by bus pass and bicycle. I just went to the train station in Lyngby and purchased a ticket to Fredrikshavn for a train departing at 00:30 on Saturday morning and arriving a little after 07:00. I could have even brought my bicycle on the train if I had wanted since all of the trains in Denmark have facilities for bicycles and the monstrous baby buggies which are extremely popular. The ticket was 310 Kroner, but I also had to pay an additional 20 Kroner for a seat reservation. The ticket will get you onto the train, but without a reservation, you are not guaranteed a seat. The seat reservation is common in Scandinavia.

So, I just took the S-Tog (subway in Copenhagen) to Copenhagen Central Station where you can catch trains bound for all over Europe. I wandered into my car and found a digital display above my seat indicating that the seat was reserved from Copenhagen to Fredrikshavn. I was thankful that I had the reservation because the train proved to be quite popular despite its late departure. We sat in sets of seats, with four seats facing a table on each side. At first it was crowded, but as the night wore on the train broke up along the way with different cars destined for different parts of Denmark and people disembarked into the cool night air.

I usually have a difficult time sleeping in moving vehicles when I am supposed to (but no difficulty if I am trying to stay awake). But, on this train, I slept and was even able to take off my shoes and stretch out my legs as people got off the train. We pulled into Fredrikshavn on time (of course) and I walked the two kilometers to the youth hostel where my companions were staying. I had been thinking of the youth hostel breakfast for the whole night and after paying the fee, joined my companions in eating musli with yogurt, bread with cheese and lots of coffee.

My companions were Micah, and Isabelle and Jerome both from France. There wound up being a good deal of good natured jokes made about each country with the French definitely losing once they tried to guide us with their poorly compiled French guidebook. Anyway, we piled into Isabelle's Renault and headed out to find the fabled buried church of Skagen.

We found the church after parking in the visitor's guest lot and a pleasant walk through the scrub pines to the sand dunes. The church was once the largest church in the country, but was closed in 1795 because of drifting sands that kept covering the doorway. In 1810, the main part of the church was torn down, leaving the white washed, brick tower remaining. Actually, most state churches in Denmark have similar towers and they are quite distinctive as you ride through the countryside. Upon hearing about the buried church, I had envisioned a lone church tower standing defiant as it thrust its last bricks out from the swirling sand dunes. But, as I wrote in a prior email, we were hoping for a little more buried and a little less church. It is not that a giant sand dune engulfed the structure, but rather they just got tired of sweeping the encroaching sand away. Our theory is that they saw the opportunity to draw tourists from all over to the site by advertising the buried church. After all, who would come to visit a church tower of a church which had been torn down a few centuries ago if they didn't put a spin on the story? The French guide book seemed especially impressed by the structure and spoke about it like it was the Notre Dame Cathedral which I would think would be quite a complement.

From the "buried" church, we drove through the town of Skagen to Grenen which is the name of the beach at the tip of Denmark. There was a large lighthouse near the point and as we walked towards the sea we found several concrete pillboxes from World War 2. Germany invaded Denmark to gain better access to Norway which was supplying the Allies with raw materials. Prior to the invasion, Denmark had hoped to be neutral as they had done in World War 1, but with little luck this time. We also found concrete bunkers on other beaches during our trip and I wonder if these were German fortifications which have survived the sand and the sea. From the point you could see an ongoing stream of huge ships as they plied their way around Denmark and into the Baltic, so the location would be an alluring position to gain a stranglehold on the shipping lanes.

The beach was very nice and in addition to being home to waves arriving from both seas, it is home to a large eagle population. We saw quite a gaggle of bird watcher with their field glasses and telescopes as they watched a large group of eagles riding the thermals over the beach.

The town of Skagen is quite nice and draws a large number of tourists. The town is famous for being the home of PS Krøyer, Micahel and Anna Ancher and other artists who were drawn by the light and beaches of Skagen. There are several fine museums to show the local work. The color that dominates the town is definitely yellow. Danish houses and buildings are almost exclusively made of brick. Often, the brick is covered with a layer of concrete and then painted in bright reds or yellows. These homes look like they take a lot of work to maintain for I have often seen people out scraping the loose concrete and paint so that a new layer can be applied. But, thanks to the Danish meticulousness, these buildings are quite beautiful. Often, the bottom 30 centimeters of the wall is painted black which is quite striking. The windows shutters are often white with multi-pane windows. The roofs can be thatched or clay tiles. They are really quite charming and I would love to duplicate the construction when I have a house one day.

We wandered the pleasant streets and we discovered a restaurant with a great pickled herring buffet which we ate outside. It was such a beautiful day and soon we were all sporting a bit of a sunburn. We ended our visit to Skagen by driving to Råbjerg Mile which are huge sand dunes which seem to appear out of nowhere. You are driving through the low trees when you arrive at these huge hills of sand. At 40 meters tall, they are really high for Denmark. The dunes are slowly moving at a rate of 10 meters per year as they are driven by wind and by filling the shoes of the countless visitors who climb these freaks of nature. From the top of the dunes you can see clear across the narrow expanse of the peninsula to the seas on both sides. According to the Lonely Planet Denmark, the dunes are a legacy of the 17th century deforestation and overgrazing which left northern Jutland susceptible to the ravages of sandstorms. While other dunes have been tamed by forestation, the dunes at Råbjerg Mile have purposely been left in their natural state.

Playing in so much sand all day under the cool, but relentless sun, coupled with the pickled fish left us all a bit worn out and so we headed off to our youth hostel in Hirtshals. We had tried to make arrangements in Skagen, but everything was full. Our hostel was really nice and with a great view of the sea. We wandered down to the beach and waited patiently for the sun to set, sometime after nine before finding a place for dinner. We unfortunately chose a restaurant with terrible service and after waiting for quite a time to place our order, Isabelle went to speak with the manager to tell him that we were ready. She claims that she just said in Danish that we had been waiting for a while and that we would like to order, but the manager literally ran to our table to take our order. Don't mess with a hungry and annoyed French woman.

On Sunday, we drove through the countryside to the city of Åhus where we would catch a ferry to the island of Sjælland where we live. The ferry costs about 300 Kroner for a car with four people which is about the same as the bridge across Funen (which is how we got to Legoland.) We wandered about Åhus for a time before driving onto the ferry and settling down in the large passenger areas for the 3 hour ride. The ferry was quite nice and some slept and other did homework to pass the time. Once we landed, we had another hour drive across Sjælland to get back to Copenhagen.

Jutland is a different place than Sjælland as different parts of countries tend to be. The trip to Skagen was my third trip to that part of Denmark, but would not be my last. My sponsoring company is located in Bjerringbro on Jutland and I will be writing more about life in small town Denmark in the next edition.

Hej Hej

Jeff

Go Denmark! Denmark vs England this afternoon. As one Dane put it, Denmark won thier group while England came in second in theirs. If England cant even beat the Swedes, then how good could they really be? We'll soon see. At work this week, I could easily keep track of the score when Denmark was playing since the whole office would give a cheer every time a goal was scored. The passion that Europeans show for football makes it rather fun to be here during the World Cup.

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