



030314 Svensby to Stockholm to Copenhagen, eventually

I woke up early on the morning of February 20th with the intention of packing quickly so that I could go out and take more pictures of the surrounding countryside in the glow of the sunrise. Near our cabin and on the side of the fjord was a small museum of traditional farm buildings with the mountains in the background, just beckoning to be photographed. From there, I backtracked and climbed up the hill behind our cabin and past where we had been the night before. Across the flat, snow covered field, I was rewarded with amazing views of the sun rising behind a mountain range. I stood there and must have taken several dozen pictures as the sun blazed in red, orange and yellow hues from behind the mountains. I think that I could have stood there, simply drinking in the scene before me for hours if it were not for the fact that we needed to leave soon to catch our bus back to Tromsø. To have another week in Svensby would have been amazing. The hikes through the wilderness, the northern lights at night and the wood stove fire in the cozy cabin. If you ever have the chance to go to Northern Norway, your time would be well spent by going to Svensby.

We packed up our remaining things from the cabin and set out on the walk to the ferry. We would have liked to have spent another day in Svensby, but the bus from Alta to Tromsø only stopped in Svensby twice a day and the next bus would be late in the afternoon. We had to get back to Tromsø so that we could then catch the bus the next morning to Narvik from where the train departed. We walked on to the ferry once it arrived and easily caught the bus since it was sitting in the ferry and not going anywhere for the next twenty minutes. During the previous two days, Linda had been absolutely flabbergasted that we would be unable to catch a connecting bus from Tromsø to Narvik on Thursday. Our bus from Svensby would arrive in Tromsø only ten minutes too late to catch the bus to Narvik which would connect with our train. In a moment of brilliance, we asked the bus driver if the busses would cross paths and if it were at all possible to make the connection. He got on his mobile and within a few minutes had made the arrangement for us. If only we had thought of that before we had left Svensby. He dropped us off in a parking lot within sight of Tromsø and the Narvik bound bus pulled into the parking lot within a few minutes. The Northern Norwegian bus drivers really have the system down although the persistent conversations on their mobiles is a bit unnerving.

So, suddenly we were now leaving Norway. We had not really been looking forward to spending an entire day in Tromsø, but to be honest the departure was a bit too sudden for me. I had not yet processed all of the events from the night before and I was not ready to leave that glorious place. But, I probably would have spent the day reading articles for my thesis, so we might as well have been on the bus.

The Narvik bound bus wound between mountains and around fjords during the five hour trip. It was the same trip as we had made to Tromsø, but then darkness during the earlier journey had obscured the beautiful scenery. We arrived in Narvik and while Linda went to find food for our train ride, I secured places in one of the private sleeping cabins. Unfortunately, we did not get as good a deal as we had gotten on the way up. The sleeper reservations should have been 800 SEK (Swedish Kroner), but the Norwegian train station could only charge us NOK (Norwegian Kroner). I asked the woman behind the counter about the higher price (SEK are not worth as much as NOK) and she said that she knew it was a problem and that we were indeed paying

too much. However, she did not know how else to do it. She told me that she could refund the money if I wanted to try my luck on the train, but we opted just to keep our reservation rather than to risk being banished to the seats for the next twenty hours.

We only had an hour layover in Narvik between the bus and the train, so we did not really get to see very much. Narvik is not supposed to be that nice, but from what I saw, it did look like a pleasant town. Plus, if there had been time we could have taken tours of the huge yards where they transfer the iron ore from the train cars to the ships (yes, I am an engineer). Our train pulled into the station and after throwing our stuff into our cabin, Linda and I made our way up to the observation car to watch the scenery roll by. The train skirted along the side of the mountain and we would often go through tunnels. As I was looking out the window, I caught sight of a bridge that I recognized from the bus ride. We were backtracking once again. If only the bus driver could have called the train engineer to arrange for a transfer. . . The rest of the train ride was not as eventful and I would go to be early after having been up for most of the night.

Around 11 the next morning, we rolled into Stockholm at the end of our 20 hour train ride. We quickly disembarked and skirted past other passengers as we frantically tried to get to the Swedish Journey Bureau (SJB) to get tickets on the next train to Copenhagen which departed in only ten minutes. Not only could we not get tickets for the next train, we were told that we would have to wait till 17:40 because all of the earlier trains were sold out. We hung around the station for another 45 minutes while we ate lunch and played the game of going up to the ticket window every 15 minutes to see if there had been any cancellations on the train. One of the women behind the long, busy counter gave me the advice that it was a gorgeous day outside and so we should take advantage of the opportunity to spend a few hours in the city. We thought it good advice and so after throwing our big backpacks into left luggage, we set out from the train station.

We had about six hours to kill and so after referencing my map of the city, we decided to just wander from one concert hall or church to the next and see the sites in between. Despite the disappointment of such a long layover, the short tour of Stockholm proved to be an unexpected treat since the city is really quite charming. We spent most of our time in the older part of the city. Like Copenhagen and Oslo, Stockholm is not a tall city with skyscrapers. Instead most of the buildings are only three to four stories tall and maintain an architectural integrity which can only be called European. The narrow, medieval alleys lined with shops and the wide, tree lined streets are surrounded by expanses of open water which offers panoramic views. Signs and barricades posted along the alleys warn of the dangers of getting too close to the buildings during the thawing of the snow on the steeply sloped roofs. The royal palace and the Riksdagshuset (parliament building) are in the older section of the city called Gamla Stan. Sweden used to have a very open government where the leaders would mix freely with people and could be seen out on the town without body guards. Unfortunately, the shocking assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme and his wife as they were returning home alone from the cinema in 1986 changed all that.

Wandering through the city was fun, but after a few hours, we were just plain worn out and ready to board our train. We returned to the station around 17:00 after purchasing some provisions for dinner and watched the whirlwind of activity around

us as we sat and ate. With the exception of the train stations in India, I think that Stockholm Central Station has got to be one of the busiest train stations I have even been in. (No train station on earth can compare with Howrah Station in Calcutta). Local trains and long distance trains continuously run through the station and people swarm through the underground passages to make their trains.

Eventually it was time to board our X2000 train and although the train departed late, the comfort of the seats was a great reward. I read articles for my thesis as the hours went past. We should have made amazing time in getting to Maln  since there were only three stops between Stockholm and Maln . However, our train wound up running late (gasp!) and we arrived in Maln  almost 40 minutes behind schedule. We ran to catch the train to take us across the bridge to Denmark and caught it just in time. Linda and I parted company in Hellerup station where I caught a train to take me to Lyngby. Finally, I arrived home almost thirty-eight hours after starting our journey.

Our journey to Northern Norway ends here, but I wanted to add one more detail since our return. Linda and I gave a presentation to the Acoustics Department last Friday where we showed pictures of the northern lights and from our trip. Some of the professors in my department are very well traveled and so they had been to Narvik and beyond. However, I was amazed by how interested people were in hearing about our adventure and in seeing our pictures. Danes are prolific travelers of the world and since Norway is but a few hours away, I guess that I had assumed that most people had made it as far north as the Troms  area. That they hadn't reinforced the idea in my mind of just how far north we had been and how terribly fortunate we are to have seen the aurora borealis. It is definitely a trip that I shall remember.

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