

TO NORWAY VIA SULE SKERRY

by Jennifer Guinness

Sule Skerry is an 18 ton Aux. Bermudian Yawl built and designed by McGruer in 1959.

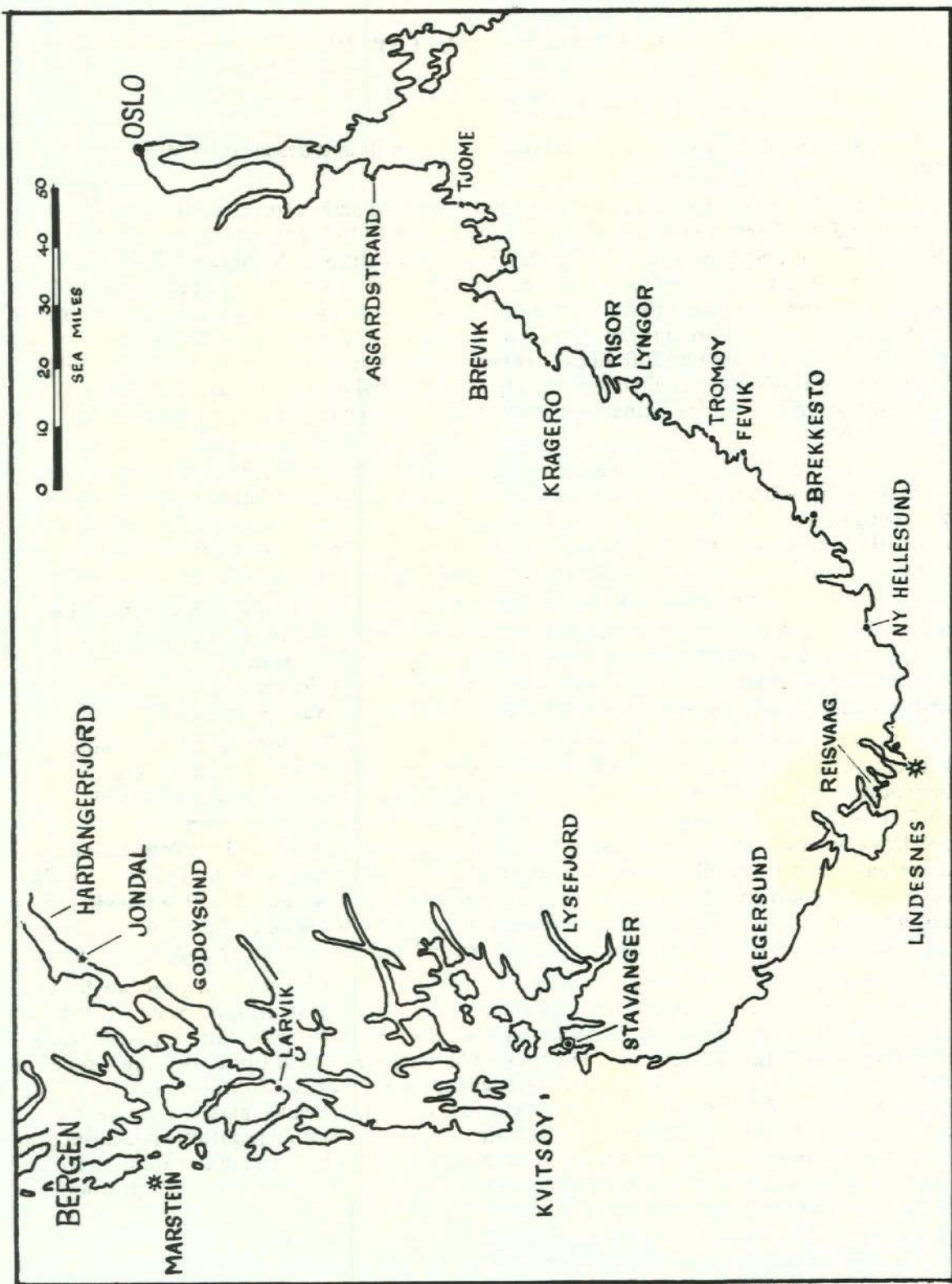
Our 1974 cruise was planned to fulfil two long held ambitions, first to take *Sule Skerry* to Sule Skerry and second to spend some time exploring the western coast of Norway. The island of Sule Skerry lies 38 miles west of Orkney. Its only inhabitants are three lighthouse keepers and multitudes of sea birds. The name means Gannet Rock and is derived from ancient Norse (Sula a Gannet, Skerry a Sea Rock). In fact there are now no gannets to be found there but the island had an enormous colony of puffins. With the exception of the passage of 200 miles between Shetland and Godoyssund, the whole 1300 mile cruise was within coastal waters, calling for continual navigation. Sailing in Norway demands accurate position fixing, as it is essential to follow the marked channels meticulously.

On Friday 29 June, after an excellent farewell dinner the crew, Davy McBride, Mary Stewart, John and Jennifer Guinness went aboard *Sule Skerry* and left Howth early the following morning for Bergen via the Minches. The self steering gear which has a deep antipathy for going north of Lambay, repeated its normal practice of working perfectly as far as the Taylor rock and then refusing to work any more.

In spite of 1974's reputation for being a bad summer we had fine weather and fair winds all the way apart from one unpleasant night off Rhum, when it both rained and blew hard from the north. We were able to listen with a certain vicarious pleasure to the bad weather forecasts for the whole of the Irish coast while enjoying the sunshine as we reached, in a 20 knot breeze, up the Minches and headed for Sule Skerry.

It was quite clear from conversations overheard on the R/T between the lighthouse keepers on Sule Skerry and other Northern Lighthouse stations that they viewed the impending visit from a yacht whose owner wanted some bits of rock from the island as a perfect example of the lunacy of mankind in general and yachtsmen in particular. John and Davy went ashore at Sule Skerry on 2 July at 1000 while Mary and I sailed around as there was too much swell to anchor comfortably. They were welcomed by the keepers who were most helpful and showed them around the station. The island is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile long and not more than 50 feet high so the vegetation is sparse. We were fortunate to have made our visit this year as soon the light will be automated and the rock will become unmanned.

The oil pressure in the engine was causing concern as it was reading high so we decided to spend Wednesday at Lerwick and find an engineer to look at it. In spite of claims that the oil industry has spoilt it we found Lerwick a delightful town with narrow paved streets and stone buildings. Strangely, the sea around Shetland was a vivid turquoise blue, similar to the colour of shallow tropical water. This was apparently caused by the melted ice from the glaciers further north. On our way across the North Sea we passed close by the semi-submersible oil rig *Neptune VII*. These rigs make very useful navigation checks but nasty hazards in poor visibility. There was now perpetual daylight so night watches were no hardship. The magnificent sunsets which merged with the dawn gave one the impression of being able to see to the end of the earth.



We planned to meet two new crew members, Francey McBride and Rangvaldt Bratz (Rags) at Godoysund Hotel, 20 miles south of Bergen on evening of Friday 5 July. It was lunch time when we crossed the Norwegian coast at Marstein light. As we sailed leisurely through the islands towards Godoysund we were delighted to see our new crew coming to meet us in a speed boat belonging to Norwegian friends, Mr. and Mrs Ragnar Petersen. We tied up to the pier off the hotel, alongside a small seaplane at 1930 on Friday, having covered 750 miles in 6½ days. The Petersens took us sightseeing and shopping in Bergen, where we particularly enjoyed the fascinating aquarium with its wonderful tanks filled with all types of fish found around the Norwegian coasts and other examples of marine life including a collection of brilliantly coloured sea anemones. They gave us a magnificent barbecue at their house that evening. When we eventually went back on board we were joined by the crew of a large German yacht which had arrived during the day and what was left of the night disintegrated into a very rowdy singsong with Davy as Master of Ceremonies. On Sunday we sailed up Hardanger fjord to Jondal where we had arranged to meet the Petersens for the "Sule Skerry Glacier Expedition." These narrow fjords are spectacularly beautiful, their shores lined with black green pine trees and in the distance the snow-covered mountains.

Monday was a wonderful day spent in the mountains. We found many alpine plants, climbed in the snow to the Folgefjon glacier 5000 feet and tobogganed down again on our anaraks, a very wet sport! That evening the Petersens caught the ferry back to Bergen and we started on our way down the fjords towards Larvik. It is possible to sail from Bergen to Stavanger, a distance of 95 miles and only cross 20 miles of open sea. We were lucky to have fine weather in an area notorious for its rain and dangerous squalls. We anchored each night off small wooded islands. By Wednesday we left the high mountains and deep fjords behind us and were now cruising amongst hundreds of small islands which are very bare and rocky on the sea coast and become wooded and more fertile further inland.

On Thursday we visited Kitsvøy, a small group of outlying islands some 12 miles from Stavanger and here for the first time we were able to buy fresh shrimps and fish. It is very difficult to buy and impossible to catch fish in Norway. Davy and Rags fished incessantly and like the Norwegians, caught nothing!

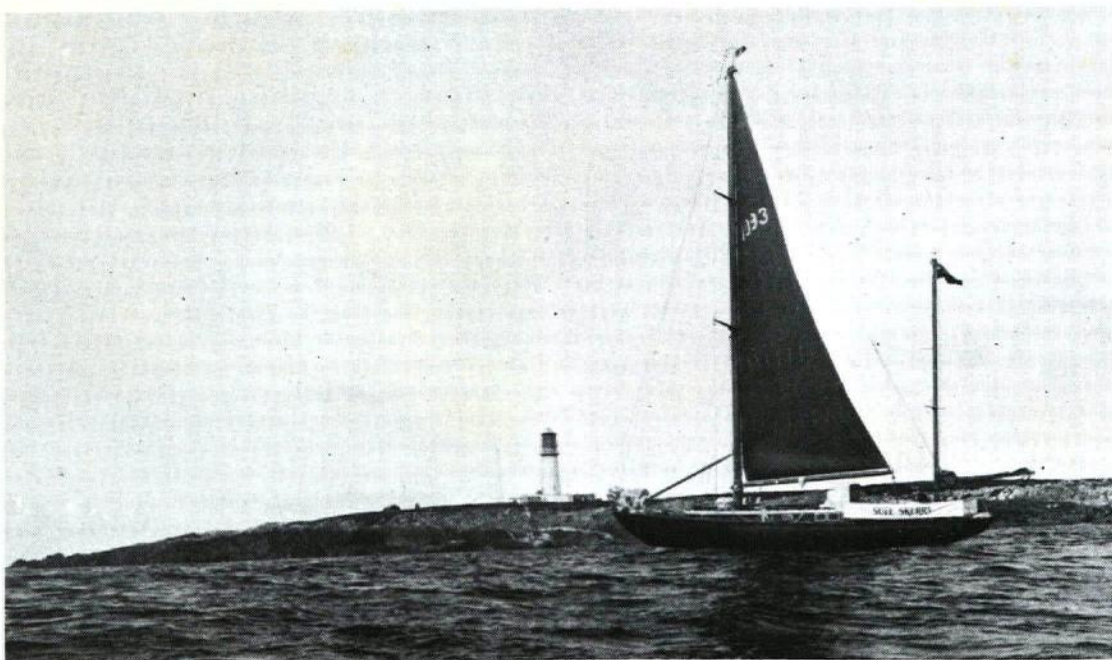
Next morning nothing could persuade the engine to start and since no one had yet explained the reason for the high oil pressure except that we might be about to run a bearing, we feared that the worst had happened. The channel was too narrow to beat through so we were towed out to sea by a fishing boat whose owners were delighted to receive payment in whiskey, as this part of Norway is completely dry. In very little wind we picked our way through the hydrofoils, ferries and ships of all descriptions to the yacht anchorage in Stavanger and with some relief we put *Sule Skerry* alongside a jetty off the Stavanger Yacht Club. The Norwegian concept of a yacht club is very different to ours. The club houses are not necessarily open on weekdays and they are unlikely to have catering or bar facilities but it is sometimes possible to have a shower. Davy and Francey left to catch the Newcastle steamer on their way back to Ireland and John and Rags went to arrange for yet another mechanic to look at the engine. The three Guinness children were due to arrive by air on Saturday and the prospect of major engineering problems combined with the arrival of the children was daunting. It would be an understatement to say there was considerable rejoicing when the engine was found to be merely suffering from problems concerning the starter motor. The children arrived on time and we spent Sunday sailing up

Lysefjord to the famous pulpit mountain which falls in a sheer cliff 2500 feet into the fjord which is itself over 200 fathoms deep.

We left Stavanger on Monday 15 July to begin the second half of our cruise. We had arranged to meet some Norwegian friends, who were also cruising with their children at Ny Hellesund in three days' time. Not many Norwegians sail further north than Lyndesness as this involves sailing up a 50 mile stretch of exposed coast with very few harbours. They also mistrust the weather in this part of the country. Unfortunately their pessimism was justified. We had our second patch of bad weather as we were sailing down the coast to Egersund. It seemed all too familiar to be beating into a nasty sea in the rain after so much sheltered sailing. We had to lie off Ruskassen light until daylight before we could go through the very narrow rocky entrance to Egersund. Rags, who had never sailed in the open sea before found the trip very uncomfortable and decided to spend the next few days ashore! He missed two magnificent days sailing along the coast in bright sun and strong following winds. We left the open sea again at Sandy and found ourselves once more among hundreds of small islands and rocks. We met Bobby and Liv-Hilde Boe and their two children at Ny Hellesund on 18 July where Rags also rejoined us. The next three days were spent cruising in company through very narrow channels and visiting Norwegian friends at Tromy and Lyngr, where we found our only waterside restaurant and pub. This is the area where many Norwegians have their summer homes and the coast is lined with attractive wooden houses each with their own boat house and jetty. Many of these houses formerly belonged to the captains of sailing ships. We were now seeing a lot of other yachts and some anchorages became crowded. Small double-ended motor boats are used everywhere as the most practical form of transport. After the Boes left us we still had a week before we needed to be in Oslo so we cruised among the islands at a leisurely 30 miles a day. We had expected to find the coastline becoming less attractive as we neared Oslo but were pleasantly surprised to find this wasn't so. Although Oslo is 70 miles from the sea the fjord has many beautiful anchorages. Particularly attractive was the small wooded bay of Sandespollen. We had more wind than is normal for July and often had to reduce sail as we went through some of the narrowest passages. Cruising in this part of Norway is ideal for those who like rock hopping. It is a navigators paradise and John was kept fully occupied. It would be very easy to go up the wrong channel and find there was no way out. By now we were following the Norwegian practice of tying our stern to a tree or spike ashore each night with our bows held to the anchor.

Our shopping was very simple as there were small shops with their own jetties everywhere. Alcohol other than beer is only sold in a few large towns and then only at Government shops. Thus the whole coast is to all intents and purposes dry, a sobering thought for those used to sailing in Ireland! Because food in Norway is so expensive we had brought all stores with us except for fresh food like bread, milk and fruit. The open-air markets in Stavanger and Bergen are a wonderful sight. The stalls are piled high with beautifully arranged fruit and vegetables.

Norwegians take a great pride in their country and manage to prevent their industries from spoiling and polluting their coast line. The oil boom is a much in evidence and pieces of oil rigs and drilling platforms are being built and assembled at the small coastal towns. It was a pleasant change to find very little plastic litter or rubbish of any kind even near the large cities. Unfortunately Norway seemed to be suffering from a plague of jellyfish so swimming was impossible.



Above: Sule Skerry at Sule Skerry.

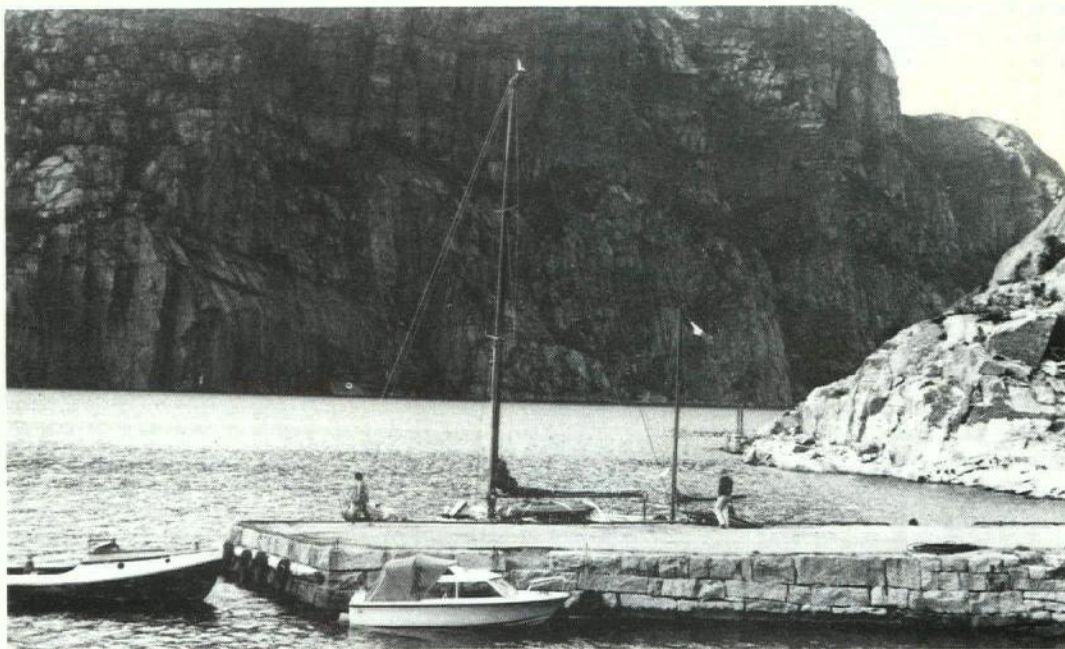
Below: Anchored off a friends house at Faevik, Tromoy.





Above: Kvitsoy — typical island scenery.

Below: Pulpit mountain, Lysefjord, near Stavanger.



Duncan and Doody Ramsay and their crew were taking *Sule Skerry* home for us, via the Caledonian Canal. On Friday, 26 July we tied up at the K.N.S. (Royal Norwegian Yacht Club) at Dronningen and prepared to hand her over to them. Our son, Ian, was staying with them as bosun's mate. The moorings at Dronningen are close to the Viking Ship museum and Folk museum which are well worth visiting. There is an excellent ferry service to the centre of Oslo, which is about 4 miles away.

As John, Mary, Gillian, Tania and I went to catch our plane on Monday morning we envied those beginning their holiday. However, the fact that John and I were going to join Clayton Love on *Assiduous* for a fortnight's racing at Cowes went in some way towards alleviating our feelings.

NAVIGATIONAL INFORMATION

by John Guinness

Norwegian charts are published by the Norwegian Hydrographic Office and Polar Institute and are easily obtained from their office Kongsgt. 32, Stavanger. The charts differ in important respects from Admiralty charts in that they give little or no detail of land masses, as a result visual fixes making use of the passing scenery are difficult. This problem is more than adequately covered by the excellent system of coastal lights, beacons and perches. Unattended miniature lighthouses are placed in such positions as to make navigation purely a matter of "following lamp posts." These lights are multisectoral and the sectors printed in the colour exhibited on the charts. Beacons and transit marks are numerous but until one has gained experience it is very difficult to interpret a chart until one is used to their symbols. Although the scale is small for working one's way through rocks and islands all navigational marks are shown on the charts. There is a vast choice of route between anchorages. However, recommended tracks are marked on the charts and give one confidence to pass through areas which look dubious at first sight. Passages are so narrow that it is necessary to shorten sail to reduce speed.

Recently special sets of charts have been printed for yachtsmen. These are good for visual navigation but cover too small an area to plan a cruise. These charts are available from any chart agency.

Coastal pilots are printed for yachtsmen which are quite well illustrated and give a general indication of topography. Although they are in Norwegian with a bit of intelligent guesswork they are easily understood. *Havneboka* by Halfd. Hansens published in 1953 covers the whole coastline. However, a new book covering in greater detail the area between Lindesness and the Swedish border has just been published under the title *Den Nye Havneboka* from Svenskegrensen to Lindesnes, published by Ernst G. Mortensens Forlag. This book is available at any book sellers.

SUMMARY

<u>Date</u>		<u>Distance</u>
29/6 to 2/7	Howth – Sule Skerry 59°05' N. via 4° 24' W. Islay Sound, Gunna Sound, Tiree & Minches	416
2/7 & 3/7	Sule Skerry – Lerwick Shetland	128
4/7 & 5/7	Lerwick – Godoysund nr. Bergen	200
6/7	At Godoysund visit Bergen.	—
7/7	Godoysund – Jondal	25
8/7	Jondal – Varaldsoy (climb glacier)	12
9/7	Varaldsoy – Larvik	29
10/7	Larvik via Hagesund to Klungerhl Boknefleet	40
11/7	Klungerhl – Kvitsoy	15
12/7	Kvitsoy – Stavanger	12
13/7	At Stavanger	—
14/7	Stavanger – Lysefjord – Stavanger	34
15/7/16/7	Stavanger – Eigersund (beating)	75 (50)
17/7	Eigersund – Reisvaag nr. Farsund.	47
18/7	Reisvaag – Ny Hellesund.	40
19/7	Ny Hellesund – Brekkesto	22
20/7	Brekkesto – Faevik Tromy	23
21/7	Tromy – Lyng.	19
22/7	Lyng, Risr, Kragero, Kirkesund.	26
23/7	Kirkesund, Langoysund, Ormefjord	18
24/7	Ormefjord, – Tjome – Brotso, Brevik	39
25/7	Brotso, Asgardstrand, Sandespollen.	37
26/7	Sandespollen – K.N.S. Dronningen Oslo.	18
27/7 & 28/7	Oslo Fjord.	20
		1295