



ELAV visit to Bardu in Norway 4 –7 Dec 06

By Sasha Laing

And what a great visit it was!

Our little party (Tom Addy, Ann Evans and I) made our way down individually, to Glasgow airport the night before and met in the check in line, hoping to catch someone else looking as hopelessly lost as ourselves. Three flights, four airports and an hour's car journey being driven by our host Gjermund Gomo later, we arrived safely at our home for the next two days in Bardu. We were staying by kind invitation of Helga and Gerd in their summer home at Streirud Gard. The summer home along with the main house had been beautifully renovated in the hope of developing a future tourism business. For anyone interested in a future very recommended visit, they can be found on the web at www.steirud.no . We arrived late and they had kindly cooked us a meal which they served in our little house, a lovely feta salad for me and Elk served in a bread crust for Ann and Tom, with lots of warm fresh bread to go with it. After a quick view of our full schedule for the next two days we went to our beds for an early start the following day.

Breakfast was in the main house and no thought had been spared, Helga did us proud setting us up for the day and helpfully told us some background to the town. Helga had been one of the Norwegian delegates at the Orkney Conference, and said how they had all enjoyed it. Having got to know each other a little we were greeted by Gjermund ready to take us on to our first visit of the day.

Bjornar Brandmo is a local sheep farmer who as part of a collective with 8 other farmers have a bought a chipping machine. They each use it as they need and then pass it on to another farmer when they require it. Bjornar uses the chips in his indoor sheep pens for several reasons, one an insulation material, a future fertiliser that is available for use 2 years earlier than hay based fertilisers used in the same way and sheep's bedding. He has been experimenting with different size chips, as the gaps between the chips allow for the air to move freely drying the chips out quicker. He has experimented with depths of chips from 50cms





down to 20cms, however 50cms of chips keep the building too warm and so they are kept at 20cms. Using chips is also a major time saver as the chips only need to be laid once where as hay would need to be done monthly. The chips are then lifted after the winter and stored for just three years, as appose to the usual five with hay, and then the mulch can be put onto the fields as a good natural fertiliser. Bjornar feels that he is also getting a better price for his wool now that the sheep are being kept on chips. He said they got the idea from sheep farmers in Scotland. Bjornar and a couple of other Norwegian delegates

had kindly thought to join us for the rest of the day

Then next it was on to Rolf Sagmo the local fire fighter and leader of the Land Owner Association who also owns and works a sawmill. Rolf was very welcoming host and had prepared coffee, cheese filled waffles and a fire was blazing in the Kata when we arrived. Rolf produces firewood and has two log splitters of differing sizes able to make different size logs to his customers requirements. He sells his firewood seasoned at a price of 600kronas for just over a tonne in dried weight. He has two tractors one has a winch that is able to drag up to ten small trees back to the mill from the mountains. A journey he makes three times a day when cutting and collecting wood. He has a hut 400mtrs up the mountain that they take shelter in when working (Tree line stands at approx.480mtrs). He starts at the top in the milder months and works his way down as the winter draws in. Rolf Joined our little convoy and we were off for a spot of lunch.

After a nice lunch at Fodgen, it was on to look at a couple of the local buildings, One that had been built using local timber, Scots pine and Aspen. This is a building we got to hear the story of the next day. Then into the town offices, that is having its main hall floor laid with birch parquet flooring, that had been made using local Birch timber by Ulf Larsen. These boards had been transported to Finland to be fired after the boards had been age hardened for one season. The results were these deep honey coloured boards that would stand a considerable amount of wear and still look beautiful.

Ulf Larsen's sawmill and workshop, Ulf is a teacher but his other work or hobby, that he is hoping to expand, is in restoration of windows and doors from old wooden buildings. He meticulously takes apart the original often rotten and missing entire parts, and rebuilds them. This kind of work is very specialised and time consuming, but he still manages to achieve beautiful results as we saw along our many travels as buildings that he had restored were pointed out to us along the way.





Lastly for the day as a special treat we were taken to Polar Zoo. The most northerly zoo in the world that had a range of wild animals from Lynx, Wolverine, Musk oxen, Mountain Fox, Wolves and Bears. The bears wear sleeping but the others take it from us were very much awake. The Zoo is usually closed at this time of year so it really was an amazing experience and opportunity to see these fantastic wild animals at all. The zookeeper, who assured us it, was no trouble, and that he would have been there anyway to

continue to feed and care for these lovely creatures, escorted us around. Our little convoy enjoyed a glorious hours wander around the enclosures with the aid of some powerful torches, many pictures were taken and lots of oohs and arrhs uttered.

When we came back to the zoo reception and were led into the large Kata and were treated to a great meal of smoked fish, Reindeer and finished with a soft goat's cheese and cream pot, with a crayberry topping. Ann and Tom had brought some pictures of Mull and presented our hosts with a bottle of Tobermory 10yr malt whiskey. This very full and pleasant day ended with a warm open fire, lots of talk and a little wine.

Day two of our adventure, We had a little later start, which meant we spent more time over breakfast talking to Helga. After yet another lovely breakfast and we were on to our first visit to Fosshaugbrua Gapahuken. One of the problems that the Land Owners Association has is that they have sold a lot of fishing licences accruing a some of money, the question they have now is what to do with it. With this in mind, at Fosshaugbrua Gapahuken they have provided a log structure as shelter for fishermen from the



elements with a place to have a fire and make a warm drink or meal. Local producers generously provide firewood. The structure has cost £3000 and was hoped that a couple more could be added along the shoreline in the future, as use is established.

As the leader of the association and our new friend, Rolf was there to greet us with another "here's one I prepared earlier" fire and a bubbling pot of very welcome coffee. The temperature had dropped from the day before so the coffee was most graciously received.

A problem that Rolf mentioned was that now they had money, developing ideas and then maintaining the momentum to achieve them was something that they were finding very difficult. This was something that we could see from the other side as both Tom and Ann as directors of their community woodland, had lots of ideas for things they wanted to do and provide, they just at present, lacked the capital to start them. This is where the ELAV project can really come into

own with the developing of lines of communication between countries to help each achieve similar goals.

As our convoy started to grow we moved on the Vikbekken museum. It was described as a museum of river machinery but it really is so much more. The Foundation who have come together to take on this project, is fully restoring a collection of buildings and pipe works that was a sawmill, milling machines and mini power station, powered by the stream that runs below it. There has been a water driven sawmill on this stream from as far back and the 1400's and it is known that Bardu throughout it's history supported 16 such like sawmills. The technology was first used in Germany, moved out to the West Coast and then to mainland Norway. The buildings are being restored using original techniques and plans. The sawmill and small grain mill have already been completed and can be seen working. Unfortunately at the time of our visit the blade had been removed for further works to be carried out, and the flow of the stream into the mill was being diverted elsewhere. The sawmill can take 3-4mtr lengths but it does take along time to cut through, however it is possible to attach 3 blades and cut the logs a little quicker. The water runs under the wheel as oppose to over and it has been calculated that it takes approx.1000ltr/sec to power the saw.

The grain mill is used by school children to learn history and by the local psychiatric centre as part of their healing process. The power mill is still being restored as they are currently fundraising to finish it. The foundation are in talks with the local power company to restore the turbine to a fully working condition and to then sell the power back to them to generate income to maintain, run and continue to renovate the buildings. It is expected that with the upgraded turbine they will be able to produce enough power to run 14 bungalows. Within the power station three further mills were housed. Though these at present have not been put back into place. So far the restoration has cost 2.2 million Krona, achieved by fundraising with 100,000krona of this coming from the Land Owners Association. It was expected the final bill would be around 2.3 million Krona.

We were next to visit the Viken Sentre, which is the psychiatric unit, but as they had patients at present we were not allowed to go in, so we had a quick look at the exterior of the building. The building was a showman for architecture and use of local timber, being again made from Scots pine and Aspen, like the new offices in the town. Another local sawmill owner Arnold Overas, that we were to meet later that day, had milled the wood cladding.

The party then moved on Melhusstua, owned by Petter Melhus, one of Norway party delegates. The house has been in his family for generations, in which his father had born and raised. It is now being renovated back to its full former glory and the house is being used a museum for three or four local families and their personal histories. Ulf Larsen the Woodworker we had met the day before has restored the windows and the main door.



A very pleasant lunch followed by some happy conversation ensued before we were treated to a talk by the local politician Bitten Hanstad, come local land owner, come dairy farmer, come forester, who had had a major influence on the new public building being constructed using local timber. She explained her part in the process and how she had come up against a lot of opposition to using wood as some felt the quality wouldn't be good enough, the amount needed and how it would be milled for use argued.

She held strong, backed by information, local millers and suppliers and the result is the town's new beautiful looking building. Its original opposers now say that the building is one of the town's best examples of local timber use.

The final visit of the trip was the Arnold Overas's sawmill. Arnold had spent the afternoon with us at Petter Melhus's House. Arnold also runs his sawmill as a second job with his first being farming. Arnold had been Bitten greatest supporter in the public buildings project and was also the man who produced all the timber and timber tiles for the Viken Senter. Arnold has the largest sawmill we had seen and could employ anywhere up to 4 men when the order required it. He can air dry his timber reducing any expense to send wood away to be hardened. The finance has run out for the Viken senter new build so Arnold is helping to raise funds buy selling the timber tiles to people so they can write their names on them and return them so they could be put up on the building.

After our second day of visits we went back to our summerhouse to freshen up for a meal that Helga and Gerd were preparing for us all. The meal was more of a feast with Capercaillie and Black grouse being served with lots of vegetables that they had grown themselves. I had another great salad and finally had figured out what the crunchy pickles in the salad were, having eaten six or seven of them....garlic, whole cloves of garlic. Well if anyone noticed, they were polite enough not to mention it. The red wine, coffee and conversation flowed and a lovely night was had by all. A fantastic end to a most enjoyable visit.



All three of us felt like we had been treated like royalty and cannot thank the Norwegian party enough for their hospitality and generosity throughout our stay.

Three very willing volunteers for any future visits to Norway here!!!