

LOFOTEN ISLAND KAYAK TOUR by JAMES BAXTER

This is a short account of a 9 day kayak trip round the Lofoten Islands off the west coast of Northern Norway and just above the Arctic Circle. They form a 150 km long rugged wall rising nearly a km high jutting out into the Arctic Ocean towards Greenland. The area is quite tidal and the nutrient rich currents allow rich fish and bird concentrations. During the summer months they enjoy 24 hours sunlight and remarkably good weather. Often, however, the spine of the island chain acts as a weather divide with wet weather on one side and clear weather on the other. The Lofoten Islands are composed of 5 main Islands with many outlyers. At the south west tip of Lofoten is the infamous Moskenstraumen, a huge tidal flow.



Much of Lofoten is composed of steep gneiss and granite spires



The Island of Mosken and Værøy beyond the Moskenstraumen



Rugged mountains are everywhere in the Lofoten Islands



Often there is a coastal fringe where farming beside possible by white beaches

Day I. 21/07/07.

Kabelvåg to Raften.

39 km. 8 hrs

This first day was east along the south coast of Austvågøya, the most easterly of the Lofoten Islands. It was a very pleasant journey with the breeze behind me as I paddled to the southern opening of the very impressive cleft of Raftsundet and made my way up between the kilometre high jagged peaks on each side. Especially impressive was Trollfjorden and Grunnfjorden about half way up.



The deep slot which is the entrance to Trollfjorden



The Trolltindan group of mountains in the heart of Austvågøya island are typical of the jagged nature of the landscape on each side of the Raftsundet channel

Day 2. 22/07/07.

Raften to Sanden.

36 km. 9 hrs

The second day was a continuation up the northern half of Raftsundet, where there was a strong current against me. After rounding the tip north east tip of Austvågøya I entered the huge Hadsselfjorden which separates the Lofoten Islands from the Vesterålen Islands. Heading west there were numerous white sandy beaches beneath the back drop of jagged mountains. There was also a lot of farming along the coastal fringe.



The white sandy beaches of Lofoten are deservedly renowned



Along the north side of Austvågøya island there was a coastal fringe between the beaches and mountains which was farmed.

Day 3. 23/07/07.

Sanden to Eggum.

50 km. 11 hrs

The third day was a continuation up the northern shore of Austvågøya, followed by an crossing to Gimsøya and then along the North shore of Vestvågøya. It was choppy along this stretch with a north westerly breeze. There were numerous rocky skerries and some magnificent beaches on this stretch which was rich in bird life.



A typical skerry full of shags with some gannets



Another magnificent beach high above the Arctic circle

Day 4. 24/07/07.

Eggum to Fredvang.

40 km. 8 hrs

The fourth day along the north west shore of Vestvågøya, followed by a crossing to Flakstadøya, and then a crossing to Moskenesøya was windy with a broadside breeze. Each crossing of about 5 km was quite lumpy. There were some magnificent headlands rising some 1/2 km straight out of the ocean. Fredvang lies beside a large sandy bay on the north tip of Moskenesøya.



The 500 metre cliffs rise out of the ocean to Medskolmen



The first 5 km crossing from Vestvågøya to Flakstadøya was quite lumpy as there was a current flowing up through Flaget (on the right) against the wind.

Day 5. 25/07/07.

Wind bound at Fredvang.

0 km. 0 hrs

The fifth day saw force 5 winds coming out of the north west. Usually this wind strength would be acceptable in sheltered waters but on the outside of Moskenesøya it was not. There was virtually nowhere to land for 40km. On this stretch it was an open ocean to the west as far as Greenland. It was a welcome rest and a chance to rest my arms.



West side of Moskenesøya is steep and exposed



Squalls poured out of the north west all day.

Day 6. 26/07/07. Fredvang to Ånstad.

48 km. 12 hrs

The crux day was along the west side of Moskenesøya. I was blessed with calm conditions and small breeze against me. After 5 hours I reached Buneset during which I had passed some 8 magnificent headlands and seen over 100 sea eagles. After an easy landing at Buneset I continued down past another 12 headlands and rounded the cape, sneaking through the surprisingly tame Moskenstraumen beyond which I camped.



Buneset Bay on the west side of Moskenesøya is a vast sandy bay encircled by steep granite mountains. Here I met 2 spanish kayakers who were going the other way.



From the cape at the southern end of Moskenesøya it is only some 7 km to the prominent Island of Mosken. From here there is a further 6 km to Værøy (with the sun in the distance). Between here and Mosken is the infamous Moskenstraumen a massive tidal overflow in about 40 metres of water. From one end of this flow to the other there can be a 4 metre height difference..

Day 7. 27/07/07.

Ånstad to Nusfjord.

32 km. 8 hrs

A calm and sunny morning past some of the most spectacular scenery in Lofoten. On this side of Lofoten there are 2 important fishing villages, namely Å and Reine. I stopped in Reine then continued against a strong breeze. After a 3 km crossing Flakstadøya I continued to claw up the coast into the wind to Nusfjord where I camped. In the far distance was the distinctive Vågakollen mountain, my final destination.



Reine is one of the most picturesque villages in Lofoten with a magnificent backdrop of granite spires.



The wall of the Lofoten Islands from the southern tip of Moskenesøya. In the distance some 80 km away is the distinctive Vågakollen mountain which turned out to be 2½ days paddle away.

Day 8. 28/07/07. Nusfjord to Stamsund.

31 km. 7 hrs

From Nusfjord there was a strong breeze against for the crossing to Vestvågøya which took 2 hours. From here the wind diminished as wove through the skerries along the south side of the island for a further pleasant 5 hours. On reaching Stamsund I decided to spend the night here in the comfort of a youth hostel I spied from the shore rather than push on and camp.



A traditional Lofoten house, called a robuer. Boats could unload their catch which was then processed above the water. The landward side of the building was the fisherman's accommodation. These ones are from Nusfjord



The crossing from Flakstadøya to Vestvågøya was 4 km and into a force 4. The jagged mountain is Skottinden.

Day 9. 29/07/07. Stamsund to Kabelvåg .

34 km. 8 hrs

The final day. From Stamsund I wove through skerries to the south east point of Vestvågøya. Here I crossed the 7 km Henningsværstraumen to reach Austvågøya again. The crossing was choppy and took 2 hours but eventually I reached the distinctive Vågakollen mountain. From here it was a slow crawl up the coast against the wind to reach sunny Kabelvåg again after 310 km and 71 hours paddling in all.



Vågakollen mountain lies across the 7km Henningsværstraumen. This was the final hurdle in circumnavigating the Lofoten Islands.



The start and finish was the small camping place in Ørsvågen just to the west of Kabelvåg.