

## Log of 2011 Finland Archipelago Cruise

By Dianne Embree

On July 2, 100 participants made their individual ways to arrive in Mariehamn for this crossed burgee cruise between the NYYC and the NAS. Some came via Stockholm, others by way of Helsinki. The main task on finding our charters was provisioning, as we had been warned that there would not be many opportunities en route. By evening, all 17 boats were ready, and promptly at 7.00 p.m. we reported for dinner at the nearby barque Pommern, a black steel wheat transporter which had been in use in the Australia trade. Cocktails were provided on deck, followed by dinner for 90 persons below in what had been the hold. The heat was intense, and men were given permission to remove their jackets and ties, which they happily did. Many tall tales were told, with Ernie Godshalk earning a stellar reputation as he related his Scandinavian tales of Ragnar and Anna Lise! After the main course, which included many schnapps toasts, we moved back up to the cool deck to have dessert and listen to sea shanties sung by a local group. The sun eventually set around 11.20.

On July 3 we left for Karingsund. The weather had been very hot and humid, but storms came through during the night, and as we headed out to sea the wind came up and the temperature instantly dropped by 10-20 degrees, requiring a quick change to our cold weather gear.

No one claims to know exactly how many islands comprise the formerly Swedish (and still Swedish-speaking) autonomous Finnish region of Åland, but getting from Point A to Point B requires manoeuvring among literally hundreds of unnumbered channel markers. The buoy system in Finland uses what is called cardinal marks: instead of the US system where buoys say 'pass to left or right', here the marks say 'pass to north, south, east or west'. This system is used throughout Europe, except cardinal marks elsewhere indicate the favored side of passage by little triangles on top of the buoy or spar – up for north, down for south, etc. But here the channel marking sticks are simply painted with varying combinations of yellow and black bands (sometimes the yellow is white, just for added confusion). With practice this does work quite well, as the detailed charts (paper and electronic, which must be used together and followed closely) show clearly how to proceed. On some charter boats the signs were pasted to the cabin top, for easy reference – and were referred to throughout the trip! Given this complexity, there must always be at least two people on deck – one to steer and one to read the two charts.

Lars Colliander, Cruise Chairman, was at the dock directing our arrival into this pretty fishing harbor, where, in Scandinavian style, one descends to the dock by means of a ladder affixed to the bow. As Petite Mademoiselle came up to the dock, she inadvertently crossed over a submerged buoy, catching the tape from another boat. The tape wrapped around her prop and it was immediately obvious from the engine noise that all was not well. David Tunick spent some time underwater trying to free the buoy line, however his scuba tank finally ran out of air, and a professional team were called to complete the job. On shore, the local teashop and bakery was enjoyed, as well as the Åland Museum of Fishing and Hunting. The Russian post office is a building of note here, however some walkers were elated to find a restaurant that was having an Elvis Presley event, with a photo of Elvis complete with moustache! All boats left mid-morning for Dano, our next port of call. Unfortunately, it was mostly a motoring day, with in and out fog, but glimpses of beautiful anchorages en route. Dano was a lovely spot near a small bridge where we all anchored independently. David delivered sparklers to each boat for us to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. We duly set them off at 11.00 p.m. as the *Loyal* fired off a cannon salute.

On July 5 we set off for Bomarsund, under blue sky, motor-sailing most of the way, noting variations in temperature, from pleasantly warm to sometimes very cold. Lars had booked the dock at Bomarsund, and was there as usual to assist. A troupe of girl scouts was setting up camp nearby, with whom we could share communal toilets and showers, costing 1 Euro for 4 minutes of hot water. Lars led a tour up to the remains of the watch tower built by the Russians, where cannons were still in place. It was almost impossible to imagine the thousands of soldiers that had been based here. There was a two-room museum where we watched a video, in English, of the

history of the area. Seeing what had been intended, overlaid on where we were currently standing, was quite intriguing. A cocktail party for the fleet was held that evening on *Night Watch*, which did not sink under the weight! Also present was a reporter from the local newspaper, who apparently made us front page news.

The next day was sunny and clear, just as well as on this leg we passed many giant cruise boats, with a cable ferry or two en route. This is a very busy boat traffic area, and is marked as such on the chart. There was some splendid scenery as we headed to Kokar (pronounced Cheur-kar) where a lay day was planned. There are very clean individual shower rooms, sauna and laundry facilities, and the shower code of the day is given out at the marina store. A couple of boats took cabs to dinner at the nearby Brodhall hotel on the waterfront in Karlby.

For our lay day on July 7, tour buses had been arranged to take us around the island. We first visited an apple farm, going on to the Franciscan abbey. Our guide told us that there were 250 full-time residents on their island (which is roughly the same size as Manhattan), while in summer the population swells to about 3,000. You can only buy a house on the island if you have lived there for 5 years. In winter they drive on the frozen water, and everyone has 2 or 3 jobs. Our guide himself was an architectural consultant, which took him to Sweden once a month, besides which he was a school teacher. The locals speak Swedish as their first language, with English second. The abbey was very beautiful and the guide there (who was also the organist) played for us on the fairly new pipe organ. He told us that historically, women sat on the north side of the church, which had no windows, and men on the south, north being the side of the devil (it is preferable to think that the women were not so much on the side of the devil, but protecting the men from him!). A votive ship is suspended on a cord in the transept. Apparently, it turns to predict the wind direction the following day. And indeed, its prediction proved accurate the next morning! The old foundations dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century had been enclosed and made for a unique tour. Lunch was partaken at a nearby house, where we had fish soup from a Red Cross cart on loan from Mariehamn (see above re 2 or 3 jobs!). One point of interest we learned from our guide is that there are no ATMs on the islands, so one should have cash for the duration of the trip. The rest of the lay day was spent relaxing or swimming, while the more active rented kayaks or bikes.

Following standard practice, a mother ship is chartered for those not wishing to deal with their own bareboat charter. In Norway 3 years ago, it had been the 120-ft. topsail ketch named *LOYAL*, which was chartered again for this cruise. The evening's plans were for the fleet to have pre-dinner drinks on board. The Norwegian owner/skipper of the *Loyal* told us how he and his father had rescued this former coastal trading ship and rebuilt her for the charter trade. She now carries 14 passengers, many who sleep in a common "dormitory" in what used to be the cargo hold. Commodore Harry Anderson, who recently celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, was one of *Loyal's* happy guests. Back at the marina, many of us cooked at BBQ hut, where the crews of *Amanda* and *Gianna* celebrated Dianne Embree's birthday. The all-male *Gianna* crew had thoughtfully made a birthday cake for Dianne on their boat, with lingonberries on top and candles.

On July 8 after breakfast, David Tunick had to go up his own mast to effect repairs, having failed to find volunteers! Unfortunately, the wind was on the nose for most of this day, but it was a dry, if again turning brisk with the wind. After another trip down a busy east-west shipping channel, we arrived at the NJK private island of Bodo. There is an unmarked rock at the entrance, however we all managed to avoid it. All the boats were somehow attached on to the 100-foot dock, some stern to and others bow in. A barge arrived in the evening with our catered dinner, and we all feasted comfortably on the rocks.

The next day was a fine sail to the port of Kasnas. which declares itself to be the Pearl of the Archipelago, and did indeed offer several facilities, including wi-fi.

On July 10 we headed for Ekenas, encountering some busy, narrow, channels, where the scenery was changing to be more lush and inhabited. The red and green buoys were comforting, especially when we spied an island-size cruise ship coming out of Hangko, a very industrial town. In Ekenas, Mathilda's grocery replenished our stocks, and some took the opportunity to dine out. Today was Sheila McCurdy's birthday, so she was feted in English and in Swedish.

July 11 – The next day's run was 45 miles, basically threading the needle through much pretty scenery to Porkkala, Bockfjarden. In the bay here, 11 boats made a very modernist star shape and the 'silly hat' competition gave everyone a chance to express themselves. Jeb Embree used an egg delivery box to make a 'square head' hat, while the Gianna crew, with Bill Huff in his PJ's, and wearing a search lamp on his hat, sang 'Looking for love in all the wrong places'. Sheila wore a very clever jester's hat made up of 7 NAS burgees, and David had a full Captain Hook outfit with a patch and mustache. All boats were prizewinners.

It thundered and rained all night, and was still raining lightly when we arose for our last day's sail of 21 miles to the NJK clubhouse in Helsinki. One could opt to take the main marked channel or thread the needle again. En route, we passed many container ships, as well as a huge race of 49'ers, and a smaller regatta of 470's. Hans Drakenberg on his beautiful *Anahita* sailed past the club, which hoisted the Swedish flag for him. Very elegantly done. Getting in to this dock was stern to for a change.

The Club was celebrating its 150 years, the reason for the cruise. The handsome Clubhouse has a Russian onion dome style from Victorian times. The showers and sauna were brand new, and were delightful, with hot water on a 1-minute timer. The NJK Commodore told us about her Club and how the Finnish yacht flag had been invented by NJK. A white cross is superimposed on the blue cross of the Finnish national flag, and the affiliated yacht club's logo is placed in the upper left-hand quadrant. This final Scandinavian dinner was superb, with salmon, reindeer and berries, accompanied by schnapps, beer and wine.

David and Lars were warmly thanked for all their work in putting the cruise together, and watching over us during it. David, as Post Captain, is responsible for all that goes on, while the detailed planning over a two-year span and daily logistics were done by Lars Coliander, a former Post Captain himself.

Following the end of the cruise, some 30 participants took advantage of an optional trip touring Helsinki and heading north into the Lake District, where they attended the world-famous opera festival at Savonlinna to see a production of Tosca.