

NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

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NBCLUB MEMBERS GO TO NORWAY

Lila Nelson

From the travel notes of Lila Nelson and Janet Meany

Where to start? The glib answer, "At the beginning, of course" is too easy. Probably, for Kay Larson, it was the moment when the idea of a north Norway workshop tour was tossed out and she, in innocent ignorance of what lay ahead, agreed to set it up. Excepting for a brainstorming weekend with the other NBClub coordinators, when they mostly supplied her with suggestions for more work, she did it all. And it was a memorable success.

THURSDAY, June 24

After, for most of us, an SAS flight from Newark with that airline's usual thoughtful service (complimentary wine and cognac for dinner!), we landed north of the Arctic Circle in Bodø, the second largest city in north Norway. The modern airport built in the shape of an extended airplane propeller extended out on either side of the main highway, which went through its center. A town of 40,000, rebuilt after being half destroyed in World War II, it boasts one of the best Husflids (craft stores) in the country; and it was to Husflid that we headed. It carried a wide range of crafts, with what I felt were good quality woven objects in traditional techniques. They were expensive, as are most things in Norway, but our exchange rate was favorable.

The tourist office featured one type of Nordland fishing boat, the "femboring", with double sails, long oars and a small "house" mounted on deck which could be lifted off for land use. The numberless boats we would see throughout our stay underlined the fishing industry's importance to north Norway.

Our hotel (The Bodø) gave us a dinner that included fish and pudding, two items that became familiar in varied guises—in this instance a good halibut salad and the popular caramel pudding, a delicate custard with a browned sugar sauce.

Clouds and a light rain covered the midnight sun enough so that, though there was continuous daylight, it was easy to fall asleep. Jet lag, of course, also helped.

FRIDAY, June 25

Some of us took time to visit the modest but excellent Nordland Museum, just a couple blocks from Bodø Hotel and one of the few buildings to escape WW II destruction. Its exhibits included several Nordland boats and descriptions of the all-important cod industry, birdlife, and one monumental silver cloak pin dating back to the 900s found in nearby Rønvik. A Sami turf hut included models of a man and woman

wearing Lulesami costumes of frieze decorated with spun metal threads. Other Sami objects were our first clue to their little recognized high quality. The museum also had a six-treadled Norwegian horizontal loom with a curved superstructure and painted simulated wood graining.

We also ran quickly into the Domkirke, a modern cathedral built after the World War II destruction of the original, where its brochure focuses on the organs (4500 pipes all told), its three altars, and stained glass windows. A very modest reference is made to the twelve boat rya rugs, which to me made the church outstanding. Designed and executed by Sigun Berg, one of Norway's great weavers, their motifs are based on old Christian symbols, and they line the walls of the nave.

At 10:30 we were bussed up the coast and on a short ferry ride to Kjerringøy Gammel Handelstad, a preserved fishing village from the late 18th century that is now part of the Nordland Museum. From here fish merchants sold dried or salted fish to Bergen and other ports in exchange for food and fishing gear. Their boom period, the mid to later 19th century, was typical for the merchants of north Norway. Closing in the early 20th century, it was bought by Nordland Museum in 1959. The 15 buildings seem to include what was needed to supply a fishing village: warehouses, general store, animal barn, storehouse, boathouses, smithy, living quarters, and areas for cooking, baking and storing food. Of particular interest to us were a number of boat ryer on various walls. In 1900 twenty-two ryer were registered there of which, eight whole and six halves remain. We were told the yarn was spun so that the ends would felt together. The flat side was woven in 2/1 or 2/2 twill, the pile, of plied wool with rag additions. The existing rugs, many with large owner initials in the pile, were probably woven in the lifetime of Mrs. Anna Zahl (1801-1879). In the barn was a typical Norwegian loom with rear support, no brace, wood screws on beater and shafts, spoon-

type brake, and painted finish. From the living quarters of owners and servants, one got the impression of a simple but adequate life style. The stark beauty of this village clinging on the water's edge with the background of high rugged peaks marked what would become a familiar sight throughout Lofoten.

Karen Casselman, Janet Meany and I, walking off a good dinner at the Radison SAS, spotted huge stone objects along the pier, which turned out to be part of a government project to bring art to north Norway. (The others were in remote areas we didn't visit.) These, by Tony Cragg, were seven natural rock formations along the fourth mile expanse drilled with large holes through which water can wash in wild weather.

After a lovely sunny day, clouds again obscured the midnight sun.

SATURDAY, June 26

Boarding a bus at 7:45 a.m. (everyone prompt and, surprisingly, continued so throughout the trip) we



Fishing Shanties at Å

took the ferry for a 3 ¼ hour ride to Moskenes on Dramamine. Ginger candy and pills were passed, which helped, and Donna Duke gave us cardboard circles set up for kumihimo to take our mind off things. What finally soothed me most was to shut my eyes and pretend to be on dry land. (A major

result of the ride was to start a kumihimo craze that lasted through the entire tour.)

Landing on Lofoten, the bus took us south to Å, a fishing village on the southern tip of our island which retains its authenticity while also developing a tourist industry. We stayed in various houses, which serve for fishermen during the winter working season. Bright red exteriors and knotty pine finished interiors with pleasant kitchen and living room facilities made up for somewhat spartan bed and bathroom arrangements.

A guide took us through the museum, explaining the importance of the cod fishing industry, the world's largest, (high grade cod liver oil was produced from cod livers, which we were invited to taste but generally politely declined). The boat ryer were in evidence on the beds, their pile side down and the striped twill flat side in evidence. We came away with an impression of a stoic and hardy people who developed certain superstitions about the sea to help them deal with its power over their lives. A cottage held a loom with no front beam but a cradled back beam, painted gray/green. Built to 4 treadles, it was warped for 2 shafts and 2 treadles.

A gourmet dinner with a salmon entree was followed by a rich chocolate pyramid-shaped concoction in a berry sauce and prepared us for a long lazy night. The quiet of water lapping under and up to our houses was broken, however, by a lively band and its patrons. They kept going until about 3:00 a.m. (when it was still fully daylight) as well as by a multitude of hungry baby seagulls in nests on all the windows and door ledges of one of the houses.

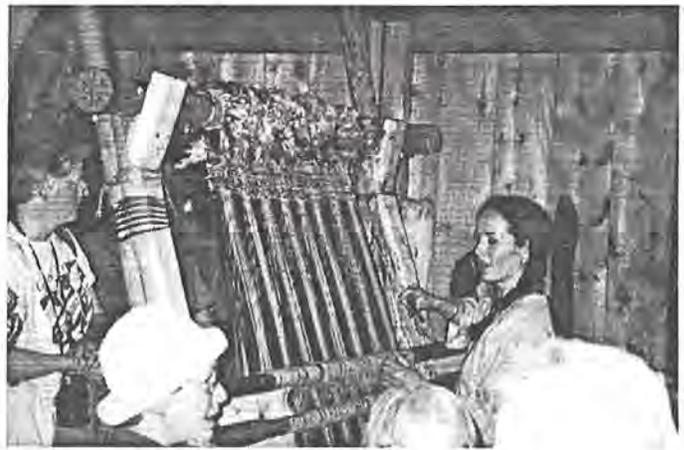
SUNDAY, June 27

A warm sunny day, in contrast to the cool windy atmosphere yesterday. About 11:00 a.m. our bus headed north on Lofoten. A good but narrow paved road wound its way along the very edge of the water where rocky crags left only a little room

for the occasional villages that hugged the shoreline. Higher mountains with occasional snow patches and some water falls were backdrops for the modest houses. There were few trees of any size, but a small type with white blossoms and box elder-like leaves was common.

Again, at the Romberg Gjestegård, we were treated to a truly gourmet lunch, beautifully served, which included mussels, shrimp, thin-sliced whale and other delicacies together with marvelous breads and coffee.

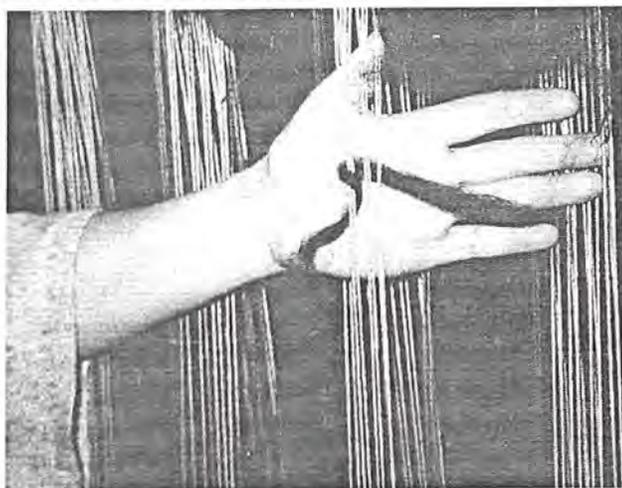
Around 5:00 we reached Lofotr, the Viking museum at Borg, the longest wood building in the Arctic and a reconstruction of the only Viking chieftain's homestead to be found in Norway. The original foundation was excavated and a recreation built nearby. The long beautiful building looks like a massive inverted ship hugging the ground, its low walls beneath covered by sod. Its interior construction, which echoed shipbuilding



Nille Glaesell at warp weighted loom,
Viking Museum at Borg

techniques, may have inspired that of the later stave churches. The dim candle-lit expanse smelled pleasantly of fires, wool, and broth brewing on an open hearth. Among its furnishings were two warp-weighted looms, one with close sett fine linen, believed typical for the clothing of the upper class. The other had a boat rya in progress being worked by Nille Glaesell, who later

addressed our group at Kabelvåg. She had a single ply wool warp set about 10 epi with three heddle rods to produce a twill ground. The pile consisted of cut lengths of a mixed black/gray loosely twisted wool knotted around just one warp and laid across a second.



Nille demonstrates rya knot on Viking style loom

In the early evening we arrived at Vågan Folkehøgskole in Kabelvåg where we would be living and studying for the next five days. The friendly, informal school principal Brynjar Tollefsen proceeded to help us unload suitcases, fed us coffee and cakes, and then carried us off for a long walk around the area. A site on the edge of town marked its first location, which was wiped out by the Black Death. Kabelvåg as a fishing village developed in the late 1700s and is typical of Lofoten's small fishing centers. A ten-minute bus ride can take us to the larger Svølvær.

Our rooms are scattered throughout various buildings on the campus. They generally consist of a central living room with corner kitchen facilities, which is the hub for four double rooms, a bathroom, a shower, and, in our case, a laundry area. Each room has two daybeds that also serve as couches, a desk, sink, closet space, and a large window. Classrooms, administration, library, cafeteria, etc. are all easily accessible.

MONDAY, June 28

Our large, well-lit classroom was the usual chaotic first-day scene as warp weighted loom and boat rya classes jockeyed for space, band weavers assembled in an adjoining room, and everyone located equipment, yarns, etc. before settling down to actual weaving. Since the classes will be described elsewhere in individual detail, I won't go into each of them here other than to introduce our teachers. Boat rya will be taught by Solfrid Steigen Aune, Løkken Verk, Trøndelag; grener on warp-weighted looms by Olaug and Sonja Isaksen, Manndalen; and Sami bandweaving by Oliva Nilsen, Manndalen. Our pattern includes a morning coffee/cake break, which was always welcome, plus coffee in the afternoon.



Teachers Solfrid Aune, Oliva Nilsen , Olaug and Sonja Isakson entertain with song

This first evening we walked the mile or so to Lofotmuseum in a lovely setting against the mountains and on the water's edge. The modest collection of mostly fishing equipment and the interiors of fishermen's huts also included two looms, one light green, the other bright blue and with a rya in progress. Two beds with rya covers were roped off and could be seen only from across a room.

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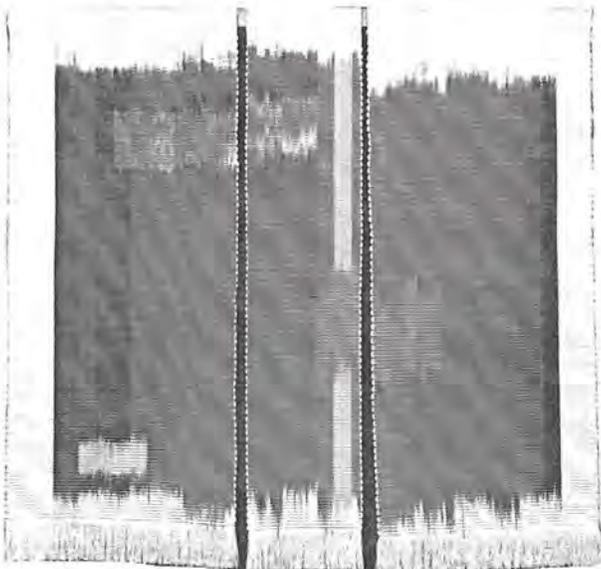
National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition

Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum's 18th annual exhibition of weaving was held on July 23 to 25, 1999. For the first time, entries were judged in one of two categories: traditional and contemporary. The judges were Ingebjørg Vaagen, weaver and Husflid consultant from Skien, Norway, Syvilla Bolson, weaver from Decorah, Iowa, and Doug Eckheart, professor of Art at Luther College in Decorah. Entries were rated on overall impact, design, and technique. Entries in the traditional category were to follow the historical tradition in technique, color, and material. Contemporary entries were to be rooted in the tradition, but clearly show a modern departure.

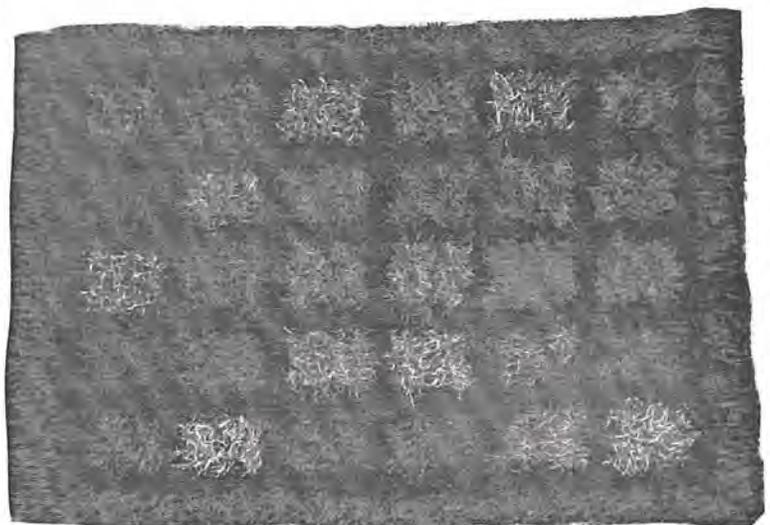
In the **Traditional Category**, the Blue Ribbon was awarded to Jane Murphy (LaCrosse, WI) for a runner in Telemarksteppe technique. A Red Ribbon went to Jan Mostrom (Chanhassen, MN) for "Midsummer's Eve," a wall hanging in skillbragd technique. White Ribbons were awarded to Jeanine Ehnert (Frazee, MN) for a krokbragd runner and Jan Mostrom for a skillbragd runner. Honorable Mention went to Robbie LaFleur (White Bear Lake, MN) for a wall hanging in Vestfold technique.

In the **Contemporary Category**, Blue Ribbons went to Laura Demuth (Decorah, IA) for "Yukon Daughter," a blanket in båt rye technique and Don Hillan (Madison, SD) for "Colors," a rep-weave wall hanging. No Red Ribbons were awarded. Laura Demuth took home a White Ribbon for "Life of Walnut Close," a wall hanging in doubleweave pickup technique. Robbie LaFleur's wall hanging in monk's belt technique received an Honorable Mention.

Don Hillan's "Colors" rep-weave wall hanging was determined by the judges to be the single best weaving in the exhibition and it received the Handweavers Guild of America Award. Visitors to the exhibition voted for their favorite piece. The People's Choice Award was shared by Gold Medalist Betty Johannesen (South Bend, IN) for a wall hanging in meråkervev technique and Jan Mostrom for her traditional skillbragd runner. Jan Mostrom (Chanhassen, MN) received a Gold Medal in Weaving after accumulating eight ribbon-points.



Don Hillan's "Colors" won Best of Show and a Blue Ribbon.



Laura Demuth wove this contemporary båt rye for her daughter, who is Yukon bound.



Jane Murphy's fine Telemarksteppe runner won the Blue Ribbon.



Betty Johannesen's meråkervev won one of the People's Choice Awards.



The clever design in Laura Demuth's hanging caught the judges' eyes.

Watch for more photos of winning weavings in the next newsletter.

Please Join Us!

Weavers' Banquet

Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum

Sunday, September 12

5:00 p.m.

Enjoy dinner and slides of the 1999 National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition. Ribbon winners will be announced and a Gold Medal awarded.

Meet Vesterheim's director Janet Pultz and hear about her special experiences with woven textiles. Cost and location to be announced.

Please call for reservations, 319-382-9681, before September 8.

WARP WEIGHTED LOOM CLASS



Ann Haushild, Janet Healy, Mary Erikson, Sharon Marquardt, Sonja and Olaug Isakson, Margaret Trussell, Ruth Beck

Words can not describe how fortunate I feel to have been able to participate in the Norwegian Textile Guild's tour of Northern Norway. The tour, teachers, and fellow travelers were all very special. I was among six lucky weavers who were able to learn the process of weaving on the Warp Weighted Loom from Olang Esaksen and Sonja Vangen, two Sami weavers from Manndalen.

Our teachers not only were experienced weavers, but they were warm, friendly women who with their limited English and our limited Norwegian, communicated well with us because, as weavers, "we all spoke the same language". They arrived at the Vagan Folkehogskole with warp weighted looms and to our delight, beautiful, handspun warp and weft for us to use to weave a traditional grene.

I have been experimenting with the warp weighted loom and I was hoping to learn how to solve two technical problems which I was having, the unevenness in the weaving as it is turned on the beam and the uneven spacing which can happen between the warp threads. From the Sami women I not only learned how they weave to avoid these problems, but also I learned a better way to weave a grene.

A few of the differences in weaving I was surprised to discover included:

- 1.) The Sami looms, which they brought from Manndalen, were shorter than mine. And it was much more comfortable to weave on a shorter loom.
- 2.) They do not use a beater or sword to pack the picks in, they use their hands to lightly pack six to seven picks and then sections of the warp were simply pulled apart and by use of the natural cross of the warp, the weft moved up into place.
- 3.) The rocks I used were about three pounds but we used rocks, which were about one pound. It was a fun day when we went to the shore of the sea and searched for rocks, which we compared by weight as we held the rocks in our hands instead of by use of a scale.



Gathering rocks at the seashore

- 4.) Although I learned many new ways that they use in order to avoid the technical problems, which I have experienced, the true secret to evenness on this loom was... "find that measuring tape and measure, measure, measure".

Our instructors guided us through each step of the process. They showed us traditional, designs, which they use, and how they repeat them. We each wove a 60 X 100 cm. grene. There was much excitement on the last day of class as we each

finished and began unraveling our grene, and the camera lights would flash as we proudly displayed our beautiful weavings.

by Mary Erikson

WEAVING A NORWEGIAN STYLE BÅTRYA

Winding along a Norwegian coastal highway I had time to gather my memories of the four previous days impressions. My awareness and spirit of adventure were heightened by doing something I had never done before and seeing things I had never seen before. Traveling with 28 other textile enthusiasts was more of a treat than I had imagined. There was always much to appreciate and share. Among us no thread was left untouched. We were thrilled with each sighting of sheep, opportunities to visit museums containing unexpected textile treasures, checking out local Husflidens, listening to fishermen's songs, walking up a trail to see Rock Art, seeing the amazing ground vegetation (including lichens), and experiencing the growing sense of camaraderie.



Above: Sally Scott, Lila Nelson, Solfrid Aune,
Lucetta Walker, June Hanson, Elizabeth Holinaty
In front: Janet Meany, Kay Larson, Betty Johannesen

The Vågan Folk High School was surrounded by towering pointed mountains. The place had a

pristine beauty. There were wild flowers, many trees, boulders, walking paths, rag rugs hanging over porches, blooming strawberry gardens, a seaport, and classic Scandinavian homes. It was truly beautiful. Everything was a photographic opportunity and in front of us. It provided an ideal setting for work, play, and thought.

On the fifth day I was ready to meet my Båtrya teacher, Solfrid Steigen Aune and warp up a loom. I was eager for weaving; being well fortified with at least four "traditional Norwegian meals." Solfrid's handouts included a short history of rugs, instructions with drawings and diagrams and a color photograph of one of her rugs. We had piles of Kunst yarns from which to choose, experienced classmates, plenty of coffee/tea and baked goods, working looms, and enough time to produce a good-sized rya.

The rya I wove looks like a bit of Norge to me. Each row of knots became a line of thought with an overall plan in mind. I included a special surprise colored knot representing each rya-weaver as a memento of that person. I wove the myth of the flailing fisherman who said, "Save the rya first, I can swim" into my rya. I imagined how warm and life sustaining a rya would be wrapped around a fisherman inside an unheated boat bobbing through a foggy cold night.

One outcome of weaving a Båtrya Norge style rug for me has been to open up design possibilities, using the top side as well as the knotted side on which I had previously concentrated. I can easily imagine the wives of fishermen or village women preparing, carding the wool, spinning, weaving and working hours on knotting colorful or drab rags, fleece, and/or handspun yarns into these precious life warmers. Each rya tells a heroic story, a mark of achievement that made life itself endurable. Now I am intrigued by ways in which to display and use both sides of the Båtrya and tell that story.

By the 23rd day I needed to return to my new prairie home for I was missed and missing loved ones. By the 23rd day I figured that I had eaten at least 30 "Norwegian traditional meals." This was my third Atlantic crossing but a first to Norge. This sojourn was literally a dream come true.

by Sally Scott

BAND WEAVING CLASS AT KABELVÅG, JULY 1999

Our Sami teacher, Oliva Nilsen from Manndalen, did not speak English, but as the days passed, we did enjoy a few good laughs as we tried to communicate. Several of us had some Norwegian words, but when a real problem arose, Kay Larson would come in to translate.



Above: Vera Larson, Katheryn McKenney, Carol Kosciak, Sue Henrikson, Tui Hedstrom, Oliva Nilsen, Susan Ramsey
In front: Donna Duke, Barbara Stam

Oliva brought many of her bands for us to copy. It was a bit disappointing to find no pick-up patterning, but she doesn't do pick-up.

So we began, first choosing a band to copy, and the colors in Rauma 3-ply yarn. Color choices were red, black, gold, white, yellow green, 2 shades of blue, light gray and dark gray. Oliva measured the warp length from "nose to outstretched arm", approximately 2 ½ yards. Janet Kroyer discovered we could make a warp on the

legs of the overturned benches, keeping better warp order and making warps as long as we desired. We were each provided with a 10-inch wooden rigid heddle, and began to warp. We worked in a woodworking classroom, and soon found a vise was a good place to hold the heddle board as we threaded. Tui Hedstrom had a long metal threader that some of us borrowed, it saved a lot of time, and otherwise we used a large eye needle.

When we were ready to weave, our first laugh came as Oliva showed us how to fasten the warp on a birch stick, (She had brought each of us an 8-inch stick.) wrap the warp around and tie it to the stick, then lift up your shirt and tuck the stick into your waistband! Shirley Butterfield commented, "I came this many miles and paid this much money to learn to put a stick into my waistband??" We tied the other end of the warp to a table, desk, chair, bench or whatever was handy and were ready to weave. Then a surprise to most of us! We wove with the rigid heddle next to our body, and the woven part towards the tied end. Most of us who had woven bands had been accustomed to having the woven part next to the waist, but we had come to learn the Sami way.

Kathryn McKenny was the first to finish a band. We all gathered around to learn a wrap and stitch technique, using 2 of the warp ends. What a beautiful finish for a band. A very traditional stitch, we saw this on old bands at the Sami Exhibits at the museum in Tromsø. Soon, Barbara Stam's band was woven and we learned (tried to learn) the next step, an 8 strand flat braid. I can report, at the end of the week, most of us had mastered this braid. Carol Kosciak, our novice weaver, was ready for the small tassel. Now we were making progress! Tassels are really easy! Then came the 4 end round braid... What a challenge, but so attractive a finish. Donna Duke was the first to put that braided finish into her band. 1 2 3 4, red-blue-gold blue. Not so easy! She finally had to go and take a nap!

As the week progressed, we all became more comfortable with bands, weaving, stitching and braiding. Then we moved on to the very large, but simple to make, pom poms as an end finish. The boot wraps have a small tassel at one end and a very large pom pom at the other end. When the Sami walk, the pom pom flips around. Oliva demonstrated how to wrap the boot. Suzanne Ramsey thought there might be other fun uses for the pom poms. Susan Henrikson decided to weave a man's boot wrap, red and black and quite long. She was weaving across the room almost out the door then remembered she needed two wraps. (The next to be woven at home). The women's boot wrap is also red and either black or dark gray, but a different pattern. They are wrapped tightly around the ankle, probably to help keep the boot on the foot. Red seems to be a favorite color for the Sami.

Vera Larson wove a band we called "Cods Tongue". Oliva's band was black and white, but is also interesting in other colors, as Vera chose to do. The language problem became evident when we later found this pattern is really called "Catfish Teeth", an attractive non-symmetrical pattern. Mostly the bands are mirror image patterns, stripes or small blocks of color. Some bands have borders with a center pattern. This is a warp faced weave structure, so usually your weft is the same color as your selvedge warp. Most bands are 1 to 1¼ inches wide. The wider bands, 2 inches or more, are used as belts, often sewn to a felted length and finished with snaps, or tassel or other warp ending. These wider bands can have problems as the selvedges tend to fray. Bands are sewn on the clothing for decoration and added color, especially down the front and at the hemline.

Oliva indicated we were to weave a band a day. Some wove 3 or 4 and others wove more. We experimented with colors, with combinations that were not traditional but were especially pleasing. We also had other experiences, such as putting a

bucket under the leaky roof when it rained, opening the window when it was very warm, and enduring the lichen odor when Oliva dyed some of her handspun. We all had a great time with lots of laughter. When is the next trip??

by Suzanne Ramsey

NBCLUB MEMBERS GO TO NORWAY

Cont'd from pg 4

Some people walked the short distance farther up the road to the Kaare Espolin Johnsen museum of the well-known arctic artist's prints and other works.

Jens Wassmo, who teaches hunting and fishing at the folk school, stopped by to tell Janet Meany the history of the loom she was using. A 4 shaft counterbalance with direct tie-up, it was built in 1883 of Norway pine, used by a Sami woman from 1914 to 1950 and some time thereafter presented to the folk school. There is a connection with Knut Hamsun, one of Norway's most famous writers.

Several people walked into Kabelvåg or took the ten-minute bus ride to Svølvær in addition to working on their looms.

Our meals included the usual hearty breakfast: sliced meats, herring, cheeses (Swiss and geitost), corn flakes, granola, breads crackers, butter and jam, orange juice, coffee and milk. Lunch included cold fishes, juice, occasionally soup, buns, meats and apples. Dinner was often fish – smoked, baked or creamed cod, lutefisk, fish balls – but sometimes a ground meat or lamb. There were always potatoes cooked with skins, a cooked vegetable, relishes, buns, and a pudding with coffee for dessert.

WEDNESDAY, June 30

Solfrid Aune showed slides of the work of contemporary fiber artist Inger Anne Utvåg from

Oslo, who had been inspired by the ryer of Lofoten, as well as several woven by Ellen Kjellmo of Bodø, author of *BÅTRYA – I GAMMEL OG NY TID* (Orkana Forlag, Stamsund, 1996).

In the evening Nille Glaesel came from the Borg Museum to talk about her studies of Iron Age textiles. She brought a formidable pile of books for our perusal and provided valuable bibliographic information gleaned from her intensive focus on the Iron Age period.

THURSDAY, July 1

The Canadians in our group passed around stickers with the Canadian maple leaf flag as well as postal stamps illustrating wool and spindles, informing us that today is Canada Day.

The mountains ringing our area have been shrouded in mists, but about midnight the air lightened and cleared.

We are aware of constant activity in addition to our own at the school. Individuals stop by for a day or two from the Hurtigrute (the coastal steamer) and wander into our classrooms to see what we are doing and to talk. Elderhostels seem to be almost continuous and run much like ours. One group was on a three-week coverage of the Scandinavian countries.

Some of us visited Svølvær today to find a thriving town with a market; however, everything closed, courteously but immediately and irrevocably, at exactly 4:00p.m.

FRIDAY, July 2

Sally Scott and I spent some time checking out the library in the Administration Building. It was not extensive, but the art books included the 1991 *NORD NORSK BILLET KUNST*, from which I tried to photograph (not too successfully, I later discovered) examples of current tapestry weaving. They showed the influence of nature in the north and in earlier tapestry traditions generally.

Today is the final day of class, in its way as chaotic as the first. Everyone is busy clearing looms, starting area clean-up, comparing results, taking photographs, and saying farewell to the teachers (though we will see them again). It is truly an emotional time because we have grown close to and fond of all the teachers and they of us. Language limitations, about which everyone worried initially, finally did not seem to be a major problem. The Sami teachers in particular were at home with teaching as women traditionally taught their children on the farms, by demonstration. "Watch me," they would indicate, and then go carefully through the proper procedures.

This evening we drove to Stamsund to see the work of Richard and Vebjørn Thøe, who are attempting to convert a building to living and gallery space. Richard paints boats and mountains and the sea in deep dramatic blues and Vebjørn does free style tapestries and off-the-wall constructions expressing personal attitudes and feelings.

We drove back to Kabelvåg via Brenna and a lookout from which to observe the midnight sun. We were overly optimistic; only a thin slit of sunlight made a brief appearance. It was cold enough for gloves, caps and coats.

SATURDAY, July 3

All final cleaning and packing had to be done today. In the morning some of us chatted with Iowa native and St.Olaf graduate (1994) Rachel Steffensen, now married (with twins) and living in KABELVÅG. Working part time, she is still attempting individual study of the area's medieval period. Ruth Beck had called her after noting her address in the membership list of TWIST, an organization devoted to tablet weaving, and she came to pay us a visit. Karen Casselman, a member of the group who had been working independently on her specialty of lichen dyes, especially the korkje she had found in the area,

presented her results and the dye baths she had prepared throughout the week.

At an evening reception featuring bløtkake and coffee, principal Tollefsen talked about the two folk school systems in Norway. About 100 are religiously oriented and 100 are secular. Originally set up for rural children (at least 18 years of age) of fishers who had little formal education, they provided about a year of introduction into adult life. Changing somewhat in scope through the years, they now admit older students and non-Norwegians. Scandinavian, German, and United States students have attended. But a number of young adults come to a folk school when they "don't know what to do next". They learn various skills, and they also learn how to get along together. Vågan folk school is co-ed, has 75-80 students and employs ten teachers. Classes, non-graded, include sailing, mountain climbing, skiing, geology, carpentry, weaving, photography and introduction to old ways of life.



Church at Kabelvåg
Largest wooden church in northern Norway

Some of us made a final check of activities in KABELVÅG, where its 1000th year of existence is being celebrated. We missed a flotilla of boats but went through an array of craft booths much like our craft shows at home. Some items were rather obviously for the tourist, but there were also sweaters, machine knitted outfits, scarves, felted hats, knitted mittens and the like. People in the crowd were well dressed; the long black skirts and camel colored tops popular in Europe were well in evidence here.

Churches seem surprisingly sparse on Lofoten; fourteen are listed for the entire island in a tourist brochure. Kabelvåg has a handsome wood structure with high steeple painted mustard color with brown trim.

SUNDAY, July 4

A comfortable bus (complete with bathroom) took us from Kabelvåg at 8:00 a.m. on a cool, rainy morning. A smooth 25-minute ferry crossing brought us to Melbu. Here for a distance the land seems somewhat less rocky and severe with more green areas. But we are slowly climbing. We reach Sortland via a lovely arched bridge, and note a white church with Victorian details. Above Bjervik the land flattened somewhat and gnarled looking aspens grew from the rocks. A thin layer of grass survived. All the roads are blasted through sheer rock layers. A light rain and mist nearly obscures the high distant hills. Narrow but well-maintained roads continue to curve endlessly following the shoreline. There is little truck traffic, fortunately. Most shipping is perhaps by boat. We are on the way to Manndalen, the Sami cultural center in Kåfjörd, but it is hard to determine our exact route from our maps. A pleasant pub somewhere provides coffee and ice cream; and someone discovers warm currant buns at a Shell station, bringing back enough for all.

Near Manndalen the bus driver started up a dubious road and fortunately found a place to turn back. An informant was waiting down below to

guide us to the attractive row of red fishermen's cottages built out over the water where we are housed. The interiors of knotty pine, rag rugs in tapestry techniques on the floors, attractive living rooms, and modern little kitchens are most inviting. A ladder leads to one set of beds overhead; another set of bunks is directly underneath. A practical bathroom leads into a small sauna with electric coils covered by stones..



Fishing shanties at Manndalen

Our three Sami teachers from Kabelvåg were at the Husflid/Cultural center to greet us and provide a dinner of two traditional soups. The one of which they appeared most proud was Romboll soup, a fish broth with rather grainy small dumplings, dried lamb, potatoes and carrots. It was subtle and delicious. The other was, I gathered, a lamb stew. Dessert was Vestlandslefse with a generous filling of butter, sugar, and cinnamon together with another cake-like but less sweet product having a layer of sugar, butter and perhaps jam. After dinner there was ample time to look at the many Sami coverlets ("grener") on the walls as well as other Husflid items for sale. The grener were woven in three sizes. A large roll of rag carpeting in rosepath was also available.

Walking back to our cabins, we passed a flat area of little hillocks, near the water, in which terns were nesting. They shrieked, and circled and dive

bombed as we walked past. Later we heard that they could do real damage and we were advised to carry sticks overhead in that area. This seemed to upset them even more.

MONDAY, July 5

Yesterday's cool wind has given way to a warm sunshiny day with quiet waters. After running the tern gauntlet, we had a breakfast at the center, which included a rare treat, a generous bowl of "multe", or cloudberry, that delicious product found only in the arctic. Then our Sami hosts boarded our bus to guide it through the countryside. We drove beneath the mountain called Kjerringdal (a reclining woman waiting for her husband who never came) and further on glimpsed the mountain which was the missing spouse. The mountains are green but rocky, and some peaks have snow. The



Lila Nelson enjoys frukost

population of Manndalen is now around 900, down from the 1,000 of ten years ago. Children go to school there from ages 6-16, but they have to leave for further education.

All homes in the valley were burned during WW II. Some people hid in the valley, but they finally had to go south for food and warmth. Some left by boat. The government provided money for rebuilding, but we were told it took until about 1950 before it was actually forthcoming.

At one point in Sami history, the government prohibited the use of the Sami language. That period has past, and there is a desire to work for its retention.

These people have a deep commitment to the land and to each other. The teachers knew the owner of every home or small farm we passed; and they delighted in pointing out their own houses. The older ladies recalled taking their cows to the mountains for the summer in their youth. The mountains evidently were places of some mystery and associated with beliefs they may not have totally relinquished. One of the ladies said that she and her mother had seen the huldra folk, those creatures who can entice humans to live in their underworld forever.

The teachers spoke of their holidays and how they are celebrated. New Years brings masks and costumes, fireworks and bonfires. Throwing fire into the water is getting rid of the old and starting anew. Norwegian independence day, May 17, was referred to as children's day. (throughout Norway, children's parades are an integral part of the celebration.) And Midsummer's Eve, June 23, is marked by bonfires in the woods.

The teachers are concerned about the direction life in the valley is taking. They described the early 20th century as a time when people on the small farms had more than they needed. But now, they said, "People use more than they can get." They want more material things and this concern makes them less helpful toward each other. Once the husbands fished in the winter; now they work in Tromsø or on the roads in order to make more money.

A final lunch (reindeer meat, fish with an onion sauce, lox, cow's cheese—like a grainy geitost—potatoes, breads, plus waffles for dessert) was followed by some last purchases in the Husflid. Warm and nearly tearful good-byes sent us off to Tromsø.

The route to Tromsø took us through rugged mountains, the sight of several glaciers and glacial lakes, and areas, which looked as if snowslides had struck. Two separate half-hour ferry rides were necessary.

After settling into our comfortable rooms in Tromsø's rainbow Hotel, we decided on a brief informal meeting of the NBClub. It was an opportunity to express our deep appreciation to Kay for all of her work and our great satisfaction with the tour in general. Then we turned to the subject of the conference in Seattle, in October of 2001, discussing possible workshops and exhibits. Betty Johannesen will print in the coming newsletter any material reaching her by August 15th. People will send me their notes from the trip and I will attempt a composite report, excepting that the workshops will be written up by a member from each. Kay will do some photo collages and write up a more personal trip report for tour members only.

It was decided that we needed a more appropriate name for such formal requirements as funding requests. However, since an attachment remains for the Norwegian Breakfast Club name (and since we have those attractive tote bags complete with the breakfast club logo) we saw no reason why we couldn't retain it as a nickname and use the formal NORWEGIAN TEXTILE GUILD when the occasion demands (such as for letterheads). Since the Norwegian American Museum has its familiar name "Vesterheim" and Die Sandvigske Samlinger in Lillehammer goes by "Maihaugen", we should be able to follow their precedents.

TUESDAY, July 6

A free day and evening during which some of us bought a 50 kroner 24-hour bus pass (40 kroner for seniors), a bargain and convenience for city sightseeing. The Tromsø Museum on the University campus was a first stop for Janet Meany and me, where collections going back to

the Stone Age and the highest quality examples of Sami craftsmanship stood out. The three Sami cultures: Nomadic, Farming, and Sea Sami, were each covered in excellent and comprehensive exhibits. A modern show on the subject of changes in the female figure as demanded by style and achieved through underwear and corsetry could not escape the hype, which seems an inevitable part of current museum exhibits. Returning to Sentrum (city center) we took a bus in the opposite direction (east) to visit the University's planetarium and botanical garden. The planetarium's half-hour show was primarily a sensation of hurtling through spaces in the sky, the city, or the countryside at sickening speeds which made it essential to shut one's eyes to blot out the entire experience. A walk through the botanical gardens was a welcome restorative, and it included surprises such as arctic rhododendrons and other unexpected flowers. A final bus trip took us over a lovely arched bridge to the famous Arctic Church, dominating the area through the stark brilliance of its white exterior, which looks like frozen slabs glistening in the sunlight.

WEDNESDAY, July 7

Again amazingly prompt, everyone was ready at 7:45 for the bus ride to the Tromsø airport and an SAS commuter plane to Trondheim. Even in that comparatively short flight, the stewardesses managed a satisfying breakfast attractively served. At Trondheim our group divided into those going directly to the city and those (twelve of us) bound for the island Hitra off the coast west of Trondheim. A detour south brought us to Meldal Bygdemuseum, where Solfrid, our boat rya teacher, had arranged an exhibit of coverlets and other textiles for the area. It was a superb collection of skillbragd, halvdreil, tavlebragd, and twill coverlets, nearly all with attached sheepskins. Two exceptions from outside the region were a double point krokbragd and a rare Meråker double weave, #301 by Berit Hilmo, in red and gold. There were also finely chip carved mangle boards in an unusually smaller size, two spinning wheels

with what appears to be typically thick rims and two hanging "uro" of pinked bits of cloth and straw. The guide knew that the latter were hung above a lighted candle during the Christmas season, which made them turn.

The museum included farm buildings brought together from several farms and arranged in the typical closed rectangle. One housed an old loom with spruce ties for the treadles and three wheels on each pulley. The area's copper mines brought prosperity from the 1600s until the present century.

Arriving around dinnertime at the Dolmsund Hotel on Hitra, we were met by Amy Lightfoot, who will be at Tømmervik Tekstilversksted (her work area) tomorrow morning. Another delicious salmon dinner with an apple dessert served ala mode ended another very satisfactory day.

THURSDAY, July 8

On this quiet, warm, sunny morning, our bus was met by Amy, who led us about a fourth of a mile to the water's edge where her workshop Tømmervik was located. The outhouse, discreetly set off to one side, was pointed out and then we sat down to the day's work. First Amy introduced us to the area of Hitra, Norway's third largest island, with a present population of 4500. About 3000 years ago the then present forests began to be burned to provide land for agriculture and sheep raising. All textile needs were provided locally, including the essentials for all-important maritime activities; the preservation of those textile traditions is Amy's prime concern. Up to World War II people made enough income to be self-sufficient, but in recent years fewer economic possibilities have led to an exodus of the young; at one time the government even subsidized relocation of unemployed off the island. Now the island has a high school, and efforts are being made to develop tourism and other activities.

The Tømmervik Tekstilverksted is, to quote from their brochure, a “non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of coastal and marine textile arts and crafts, established on the island of Hitra in Norway in 1997....Our major goals are to document, research and preserve textile traditions...” Amy is director. Her present skilled assistant Mona Aarø has received funding to continue work for the next three years. The studio is a former Trondheim schoolhouse built in 1905.

The ancient textile traditions that Amy seeks to revive and preserve are based on the products of the “utgangersau” (free ranging sheep), which lived outside and were usually totally independent. The result was a fleece with varied types of wool and an inner and outer coat. Because no other types of sheep were introduced, gene factors remained unaltered through the years, and people became constantly more adept at recognizing qualities of particular importance. For example, they learned that a straight nosed ram produced offspring with softer wool than the hooked nosed ram. And they recognized sheep with wool which provided the best yarn for the all-important fishermen's mittens. They learned that white wool was stronger than that from others of this multi-colored breed. The coarse outer wool with guard hairs provided outer clothing, some bedding, ship sails and other maritime needs while the soft inner coat gave wool for inner and fine clothing.

Other parts of the sheep were also used. Milk and meats were two essentials. The small intestine, washed, soaked in brine, turned inside out and spun became spinning wheel cords and violin strings. Horns were heated and molded into spoons and other objects. The leg bone was a bobbin, the hip bone a flute, and the hide produced shoes. Mountain climbing shoes had a felted wool exterior with the long back hairs providing a soft inside just as it came from the sheep.

Amy learned much of this lore from listening to old timers on Hitra as they talked about the past.

The shortages during the World War II occupation forced many Norwegians to recall and reuse former skills in order to survive.

Breeding practices insured stronger and healthier sheep. Ewes were not bred until nearly three years of age and usually produced one lamb. If there were two, one would probably not be able to survive. Early breeding was discouraged by fashioning for the ewe a sort of apron over her rear. Rams ready to breed were kept separate from around June 23 (rooing time) until December 10, this timing insuring that young lambs would not be preyed on by eagles (in the days when eagles were plentiful enough to be a menace). Fencing, however, proved problematic because the impressive horns of the rams could get entangled in the barbed wire. Rams, not to be bred, were castrated and then mingled with the flock. Their presence seemed to have a calming influence on the flock. These rams had a different quality of wool.

Mittens which kept a fisherman's hands warm even when both hands and mittens were wet was essential. Along with the choice of wool, the maker had to know the best style and size. Mittens were netted or knitted with a thumb on each side, thus providing the possibility for two palms, where most wear occurred. And they were generally nearly double the ideal size they would reach after fulling and use.

Amy discussed differences in wools available at present. The spelsau descends directly from free-range sheep but differences in wool arise from differences in care and feeding. She showed early Shetland fleeces, pointing out their similarity to utvandrer wool as compared with later industrial controlled Shetland fleeces.

Removal of fleece, to “ru” or “roo”, occurs between the last half of June and the last half of July, when it can be plucked or rolled rather than sheared, leaving a soft undercoat to protect from

cold days—or sunburn. The fleece is twisted into a loose rope and then brought into a ball and placed in a bag. In Shetland it is stored thus until winter, but in Iceland and the Faeroes it is first washed because it is often full of peat dirt. In Shetland it was hand teased, and sprinkled with cod liver oil. In Norway Paraffin was sprinkled on it to loosen the lanolin.

Amy now has her wool carded, unwashed, at a small carding concern near the Manndalen Sami center (also used by the Sami): Kåfjord Ullkardereri, 9071 Birtavarre.

Amy credited our Lofoten boat rya teacher Solfrid Aune for having created in 1984 a reproduction of a Viking sail based on what knowledge and materials were available to her. These were actual examples of Viking sails, pieces of which were discovered in the process of taking down early stave churches, where old sails had served as caulking in the walls. Examination showed that the warp was of tightly spun outer wool, the weft from the softer undercoating. Structure was a 2/1 diagonal twill with a right direction.

Amy wanted to start at the beginning, insofar as that was possible, with a product as close to the original as she could get. This was why she began with early sheep and then raised them using traditional methods at every step. Since 1992 she has made three wool sails, processing 800 kilos of wool in the process.

The wool is prepared by separating the long hair from the soft undercoat, pulling it apart by hand. Sturdy metal combs are used for the long wool, a rollag wound off by hand and then spun with a tight Z twist for warp. The softer undercoat is carded with standard cards with an S twist for weft. Weaving for the sails is in a 2/1 twill, dressed on the warp face. The weft side will catch the wind while the warp-faced side will let the wind pass. The finished cloth is slightly full, making it more windproof. She reports the width

of the final product as fairly stable, but the length shrinks. Fulling results in at least doubling (if not more) the original thickness. The lengths of cloth are then sewn together by a sailmaker. Finally, the material is sunk into salt water and dressed with fir-tar, fish oil, and sheep's tallow. (For a further report of procedures, Amy referred us to the #2 1997 issue of the periodical SPOR.)

The late morning and early afternoon sped by in examining the supplies of wool in varied stages of processing, trying out the wool combs for carding, testing the cleft sticks which could be used to spin while walking as well as trying the standard wool wheels and walking wheels, and in further conversations with Amy.

In the late afternoon, Amy's husband Per and teen-aged son Jens joined us to provide a grand conclusion to the day. Both capable seamen familiar with safe navigation routes through the countless rocky islands, small and large, that filled the waters off Hitra, they gave us a sometimes breathless close-up of the area. At one point the boat was brought up to a rocky ledge on which Amy crawled to scrape some lichen samples for Karen Casselman; (I didn't see the escapade up close because this Midwest landlubber was too scared to look).

The VITA showed signs of age and proceeded at what may have been a slightly slow, somewhat rheumatic pace but which I found exactly right for enjoying the gently passing lovely scenery. It was a famous boat in its own right, used in World War II for ferrying people to the safety of the Shetland Islands and bringing back ammunition. The Germans caught up with it on its eighth mission and then used it to patrol the Norwegian coastal waters until the war's end, after which it served as a fishing vessel for some time. Amy and Per are trying to keep it operable and use it to visit the island on which the free ranging sheep live. Erik Bye, well-known and beloved Norwegian TV personality, author and poet interviewed Per on

the boat in July a year ago, admonishing his government to support the restoration and conservation of this historic vessel.

Relaxed and pleasantly weary, we lingered over a dinner at Bårdshaug Manor House, arriving at the Hotel Britannia near midnight. The tour members who had spent the day in Trondheim had begun to wonder about us.

FRIDAY, July 9

Much of this day was given to the Kunstindustrimuseum, where Konservator Astri Aasen gave us her full day to make it one of the most enjoyable, productive, and satisfying of the tour. A current large exhibit featured the work of three major Norwegian women, two of whom were tapestry weavers with a number of objects already part of this museum's collection. It is known for its Hannah Ryggen pieces, which line the walls of a large auditorium, and Astri Aasen gave an excellent, in-depth presentation about Ryggen's life, philosophy, and approach to her art. Then followed an equally fine treatment of Synnøve Aurdal, with reference to differences between the work of these two women. The displays of the work of the third female artist, glass designer Benny Motzfeldt, were an obvious temptation to Astri, but she passed them sternly, admonishing herself and us that our focus was on textiles.

In a separate room, textiles from storage were laid out for our inspection and catalogue information was provided. They included examples from all the major traditional Nordland techniques: boat ryer, Meråker double weave, skillbragd and other overshot weaves, rutevev, etc. A rare Meråkervev horse blanket, earlier requested by Betty Johannesen, was also present. Astri Aasen not only spent afternoon time telling us more about these pieces; she even helped hold them to facilitate photographs.

A knowledgeable English-speaking guide who focused on the differences between the early Romanesque beginnings and later Gothic style completion of the building enhanced a visit to Trondheim's justly famous Nidaros Cathedral. There was time to go into the large courtyard adjoining the church and get acquainted with the large Archbishop's Museum, filled with broken statues found in ruins (two major fires were part of the church's history) or architectural pieces produced but never used. Some of us returned for a twenty-minute evening service in which the organist gave brief full range to the large organ.

Ann Haushild marked the eve of a birthday, which shall remain unspecified by slipping on an uneven sidewalk and fracturing her right wrist. She got immediate medical attention and will return for some further work tomorrow morning. If it had to happen, at least Ann picked the proper wrist; she is left-handed.

Some of us gathered informally in the evening at our attractive hotel for drinks, dessert, coffee or whatever. My dessert was memorable--two squares of Norwegian ice cream (which is more creamy and custardy than American and definitely addictive) artfully surrounded by a light sauce filled with huge blackberries, blueberries and sliced strawberries and pierced by a long slim chocolate sliver. Two meltingly buttery cookies and marvelous coffee accompanied.

SATURDAY, July 10

We are beginning to be aware that the tour, for many of us, is coming to an end. A number, fortunately for them, will include other parts of South Norway, Sweden, or other areas in their personal plans.

This morning Janet Meany and I walked over to the University museum to see Amy Lightfoot's exhibition of her sail for the SARA KRISTINE, which included an actual sail partially raised together with a comprehensive explanation,

photographs and samples dealing with the production of the sail. There are efforts to have the exhibit travel; I thought of how dramatic a presentation of the huge sail completely unfurled would be.

A 10:30 bus took us into the countryside east of Trondheim to Hegra, the studio of weaver Heidrun Kringen. Her presentation was part of a united community effort to promote tourism. She has restored a small rural school, using the first floor for her weaving studio and creating a school museum on the second. A young interpreter then accompanied our bus to the Bronze Age Leirfall rock carvings. A short ride through the countryside, with areas of large farms and broad valleys, brought us to Hembre Gard, a charming Victorian style villa with additional modern log structures for travelers, where we were served a kind of soup traditional to the area. The standard boiled potatoes were passed, which we cut up in our soup bowls; then tureens of a clear broth filled with carrots and small light-colored meatballs (veal, elk, beef?) having a slight nutmeg flavor were poured over. After this satisfying dish came buttered and sugared lefse with coffee.

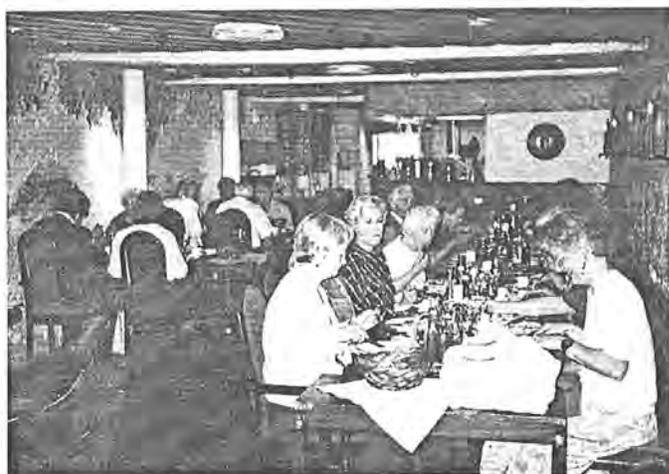
SUNDAY, July 11

We spent this last day of our tour at the Trøndelag Folk Museum, an area almost too large to encompass completely on foot and just on the outskirts of Trondheim. Two excellent guides took us through several of the early farm buildings and past the smallest and possibly earliest of Norway's remaining stave churches. A number of textiles traditional to Trøndelag were brought from storage for us by guides Lillian Evensen and Anne Laila; white gloves were provided so we could inspect (carefully) and photograph them.

Ryer were used in beds as well as the open boats. After accumulating enough wool, which could take three or four years, a grandmother might do the spinning and women the basic weaving with

children allowed to tie the two-inch long pile knots.

A typical 19th century fishermen's shanty provided four beds for 8 men in one room. Until 1850 the wood structure had a turf roof with several layers of birch bark and two layers of turf, one facing down the other up.



Time to say goodbye

In the evening, a festive roast pork dinner together was lively; but there was an underlying recognition that it was the last one and that a very special experience was coming to an end. What Lloyd Hustvedt wrote in his inimitable way at the end of his forty-year tenure as head of the Norwegian American Historical Association summed up our feelings:

“Now it is farewell time and saying farewell is something I’ve never learned to do well. For each serious goodbye, we leave behind a piece of ourselves. Yet, it is in moments of departure that we know what love is.”

Weaving Class

Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa

Rutevev (Geometric Tapestry Weaving)

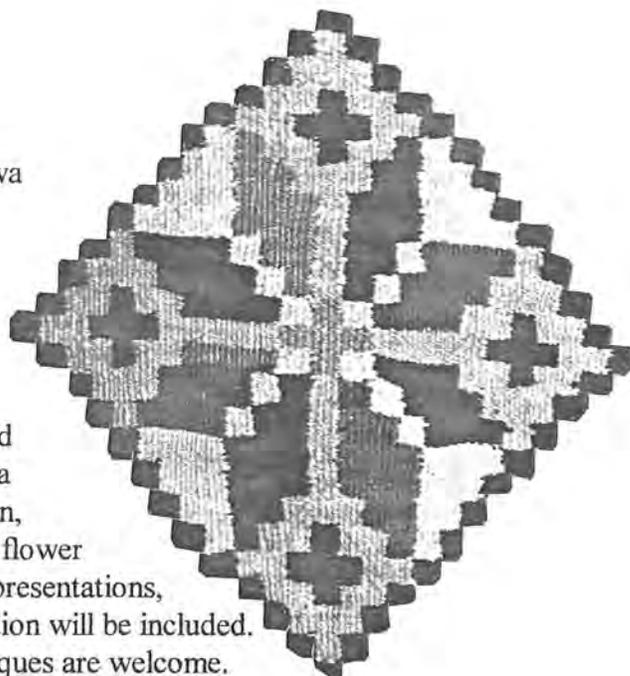
taught by Syvilla Tweed Bolson and Jan Mostrom

September 13-16, 1999

\$155 / \$130 for Vesterheim members + supply kit

Rutevev is a geometric tapestry technique historically used for coverlets (åklær) on the west coast of Norway and in a few valleys inland. Using floor looms and Norwegian yarn, students will learn the basic weave on a single eight-petal flower motif and try several border techniques. Lectures, slide presentations, and opportunities to view artifacts in Vesterheim's collection will be included. All students with a basic understanding of weaving techniques are welcome.

Call 319-382-9681 for more information or to register.



SECOND CONFERENCE ON NORWEGIAN TEXTILES

Planning is underway for the Second Conference on Norwegian Textile, to be held in Seattle in October of 2001. The event will be organized under the auspices of the Nordic Heritage Museum, and will coincide with an exhibition of traditional Norwegian coverlets opening at the museum in September. A gallery room has been reserved for an exhibition of contemporary weaving in the Norwegian tradition as well, an event in which we hope many of you will participate (more details on that in upcoming newsletters).

Currently our plans are to hold the conference at the Seattle Center, site of the 1962 World's Fair

and home of Seattle's landmark Space Needle. The Center offers a variety of meeting spaces with nearby hotels and is close to the downtown area and the waterfront. Further conference information, including dates, featured speakers, seminars and workshops, will be forthcoming in future newsletters. Anyone with ideas or suggestions would be most welcome to contact Kay Larson at 9390 Miller Rd NE, Bainbridge Is, WA 98110, (206) 842-7734, kaylarson@hotmail.com

Kay Larson

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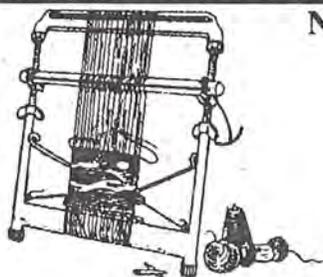
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