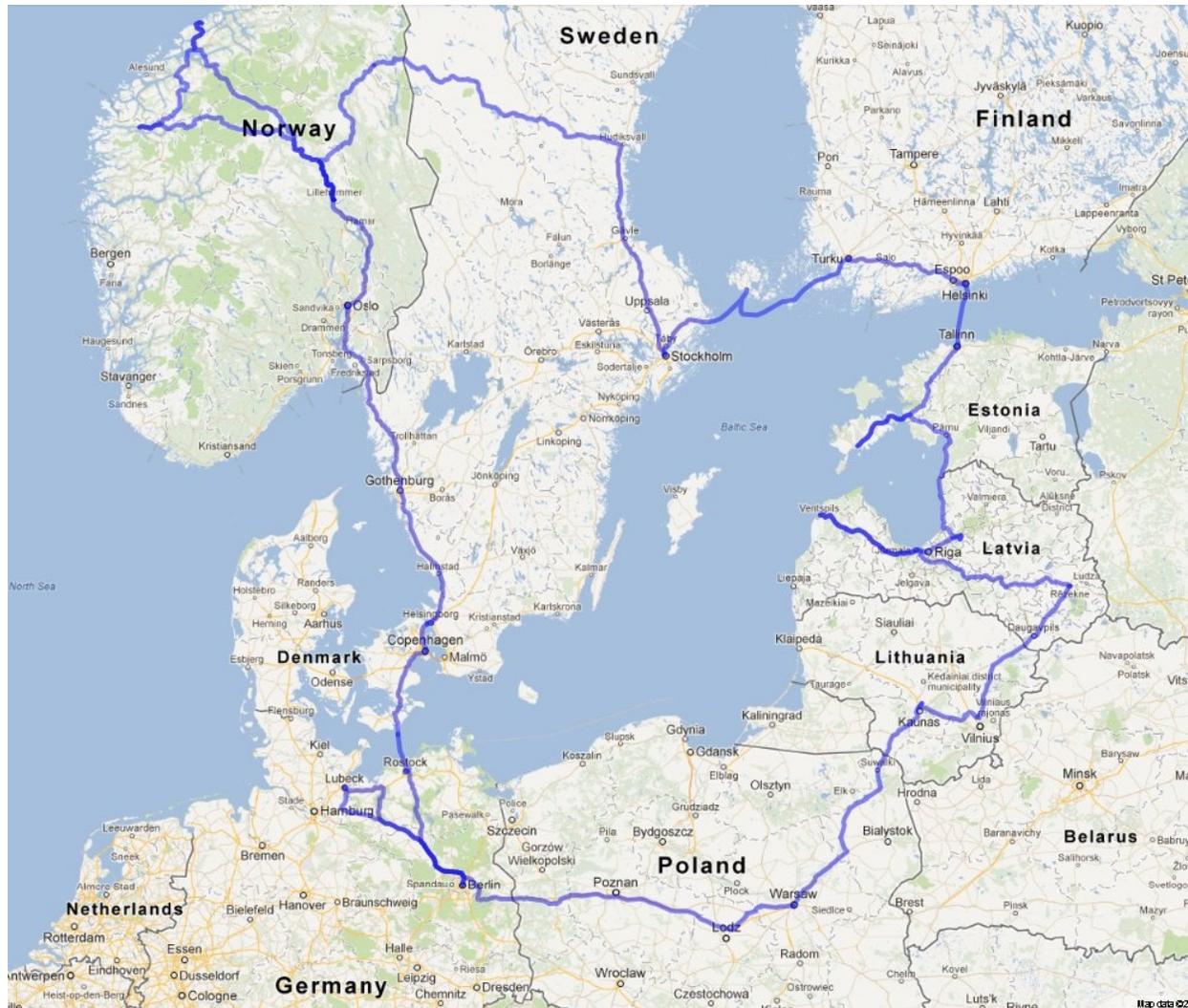


Howdy, howdy, howdy !

Well, it's almost fall, and we have just finished a month-long European driving trip, concentrating on the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, with Poland and parts of Northern Germany thrown in for good measure -- 7400 kilometers in all!



The route basically started and ended in Berlin, taking advantage of our favorite low-budget accommodation in that marvelous city (where Bruce was once graciously hosted by the U.S. Army back in the early 1960s) -- the Pension Bella, just a couple of blocks from the toney Kurfürstendamm in downtown Berlin-Charlottenburg, for only 48 Euros a night, including a great breakfast! In some ways the trip was a rehash of an 3-month 8000-kilometer biking trip taken by Bruce back in 1964, which covered Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The Baltic countries were tossed into the mix this time around both because of relatives from there, as well as the presence of a Latvian friend we had hoped to visit (and did!). Poland was an unintentional add-on because we were unable to get a ferry from Lithuania back to Germany. We had heard bad things about carjackings and general thuggery in Poland, but fortunately that turned out to be pretty much a thing of the past (1990s and early 2000s) as long as reasonable security precautions are observed.

Rather than bore everyone with a detailed account of our travels, we will simply tell two very short stories related to things which occurred along the way ...

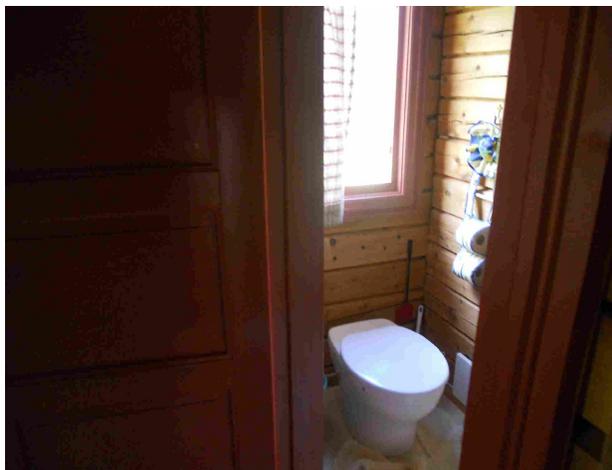
A Norwegian Story -- Some friends of ours from Stanford Research Institute are Marc and Ragni -- he a Frenchman and she a Norwegian, who met while in engineering school in Lyon back in the 1950s, married, had three children, and who now divide their time between California, France, and Norway! Back around 1960 Marc's family had acquired a small chalet in southern France for a bargain price, and over the years they had put a substantial amount into restoring it into a handsome residence. Ragni had always yearned to have a place in Norway as well, and a few years ago she determinedly entered into a search for a place in the Rondane National Park, just north of Lillehammer, where childhood friends of hers had built a cabin. Their first try at buying a place (in absentia) went awry when it turned out the place that was recommended to them was set low in a small valley and not at all what they were looking for. They then posted a notice at the local post office and scored when they found a place on a hill with a marvelous view of the Rondane Park, and, in addition, the credentials of once having been owned by the Queen of Norway. The Queen had apparently been an enthusiastic cross-country skier, and while visiting them we had the honor of being allowed to sit on the same chemical toilet that the Queen herself had once used! The little jink in the upper left of the map above is the 6-day round trip we made with them to visit a healthy share of glaciers, fjords, and even the famed Atlanterhavsveien highway -- an intriguing set of roads and bridges connecting several islands along the coast just south of Kristiansund.



Kathy at Marc and Ragni's chalet
(sod roof is typical of that area)



Dining area, Rondane mountains
(with Marc's painting easel outside)



The Queen's throne !



Ragni, Loulou, Marc, and Kathy



Ragni & Kathy looking down on the Trollstigen serpentine road



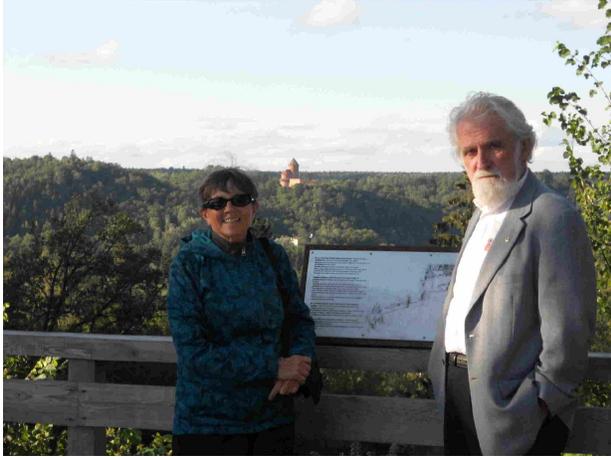
Kathy & Bruce with Geiranger fjord in the background (note the cruise ship!)

All in all, a wonderful visit hosted by very congenial friends. It was our luck that they happened to be in Norway at the same time as ourselves ...

A Latvian Story -- Our Latvian visit was a real exercise in Second World War history, for which fortunately we had a Netbook along to prime ourselves. Our friend there, Juris, was born in 1936 in a tiny settlement near the hamlet of Pededze in Eastern Latvia. One of his forebears had earlier emigrated to Latvia from Bohemia to prevent his sons from becoming 'cannon fodder' in the Austro-Hungarian army. Juris's father was a member of the class the Soviets called 'kulaks' -- wealthy 'peasants' who had accumulated modest land holdings of a few tens or even hundreds of acres. In 1940, after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Stalin and Hitler, the Soviet army marched westwards to annex and invade all three of the Baltic countries -- Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Soviet policy was to collectivize the land holdings of the wealthiest kulaks and, just for good measure, to execute the head of each family! Juris's family's land holdings were seized, but for some reason his father escaped execution (perhaps because he was the mayor of the small village in which they lived). One year later, in 1941, Hitler renounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and marched eastwards to invade Russia, as well as the Baltic countries. The area remained under German control until 1944 when the Soviets came back through, headed west again, this time for Berlin -- three major invasions in two different directions inside of five years. As the Russians were approaching in 1944, Juris's father knew he was unlikely to escape execution a second time, and so they fled west towards Northern Germany, eventually ending up in DP camps for several years in the area around Lübeck, just north of Hamburg. In time, they emigrated to the United States, first to Brooklyn, then eventually to the Palo Alto area where Juris attended Stanford and went to work at Stanford Research Institute, where we first met back in 1968.

Juris and his wife Rita (also Latvian, although with a different exit history!) were very active members of the Latvian emigré community in the San Francisco Bay Area. When the Soviet Union broke up around 1990, Juris took advantage of an offer by the newly formed Latvian government to re-acquire the lands which had been expropriated from his family, and he came into possession of several hundred acres of land in two separate parcels (35 and 155 hectares) right where his father's holdings had been. After retiring in 1998, Juris and Rita decided to return to Latvia to live, but they were by then too old to be able to re-start a farm holding which had lain idle for many years. They looked around for someone younger who would be willing to live on and work the land -- in the spirit of a tribute to his own family's memory. In 2002, they found a young couple, Armands and Ilze, who were interested in starting a fish hatchery operation, and over the intervening 10 years, with considerable help from Juris and Rita, they have built up a very successful, although as yet not quite economically sustainable, operation. Although Juris and Rita had no children of their own, they did form close bonds with Armands and Ilze and their eventual 3 children. Rita died two years ago, and Juris is now by himself, although with a very special family of his own making and to whom he recently gifted the entire property, hoping the timber will provide them with enough income to continue developing the fish hatchery operation. Juris lives mainly in the nearby town of Sigulda, a short ways from Riga, but spends a few days each month on the land in a pleasant apartment in the large 4-bedroom house he and Rita built for the couple and their children. It is really quite a wonderful story, and it made our trip to that

area very meaningful in a way we had never expected. It also made us very grateful for the relatively placid course that our own lives have followed



Kathy and Juris at castle outside Sigulda



Bruce, Juris, Armands with original mill stone in background



Ilze up early to pick flowers from their garden for Juris to put on Rita's grave



Juris and Kathy tidying up Rita's grave (and eventually his own-to-be)



House that Juris and Rita build for Armands and Ilze



Kathy standing next to one row of fish hatchery tanks (most of them quite full!)

We hope that you have all had interesting trips of your own this summer and look forward to hearing from anyone who would be interested in sharing their own experiences ... Cheers as always, Bruce and Kathy