

NORGE NEWS

Wednesday, 20 February 2019

On the day train, Bodø-Trondheim, Norway

Fjellet & Fjord

(mountains & fjord)

Six days after crossing the Arctic Circle northbound on our Hurtigruten ship, we left the Arctic on Wednesday aboard the day train from Bodø (BOO - dah) to Trondheim on the 450-mile Nordlandsbanen, the northernmost line of Norway's NSB passenger railroad. The monument marking the Arctic Circle is located in Saltfjellet (salt mountains)-Svartisen Nasjonalpark about 1.1 miles (1.8 km) south of the highest point on the line at 2,230 feet (680m) above sea level.

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When most people think of the Arctic, they think of a frozen wilderness. Most of it is.

Across Alaska, the Canadian territories and Siberia, the small villages that do exist are inhabited by subsistence-dwellers. They have electricity because a plane flies in once a week to deliver new fuel for the generator. If the hunting is good, so is life.

Arctic Norway isn't like that, and until the six days we just spent there, I don't think I fully appreciated the difference.

People in Norway who live above the Arctic Circle commute to cities and towns on trains, cars, buses and ferries. There are office buildings where folks sit

in short-sleeved shirts and talk about whatever they're finding on their Excel spreadsheets.

Mail comes through the door slot and the internet. Mothers push babies down the sidewalk in strollers, buy groceries at the Rema 1000 and get their hair done.

For the most part, it is an urban life.

A big reason is it's so much warmer, as I wrote about in my second newsletter here <https://bit.ly/2Noyz1f> last week.

There are occasional stretches of arctic cold – below
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This is the place where the arctic we experienced finally matched the arctic of our imagination. The day before taking the train to Trondheim, we drove from Bodø up to Saltfjellet because its extreme weather and lack of vegetation gives it the bleak tundra look we expected to see more of on this trip. Highway E6 is behind me in this east-facing view. The rails of the Nordlandsbanen are dark lines across the picture just above this caption. The Swedish border is about 5 miles (8km) toward the top of the picture, atop a mountain ridge obscured by snow and cloud. The Norwegian coast is about 30 miles (48km) behind us. At times the wind, snow and cloud through this north-south valley was a near white-out. Crossing Saltfjellet by train or car is the only land route linking the northern and southern parts of Norway.

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zero, whether by Fahrenheit or Celsius – but the ocean doesn't freeze here. Hurtigruten ships don't dodge ice bergs. Polar bears don't wander onto the mainland from the ice pack because the ice pack, even in the far north, is still hundreds of miles offshore.

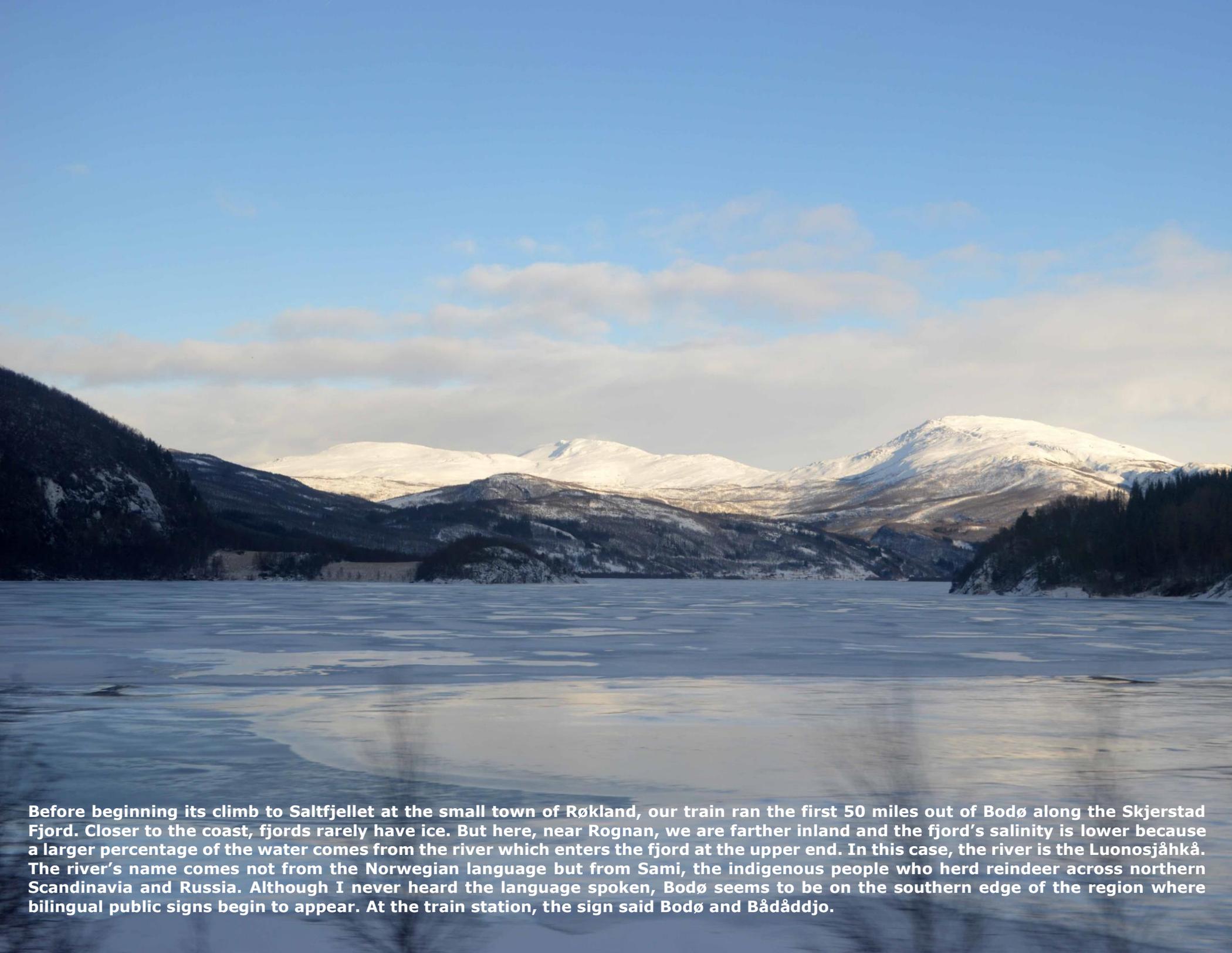
To get a hint of what the arctic of our imaginations is like, you have to find those places in Norway's narrow stretch of interior like Saltfjellet-Svartisen Nasjonalpark that are shielded from the warming effects of the Gulf Stream by mountains.

It's high country by Norwegian standards, 5,000 feet or more and often windswept, where the moose and reindeer play. Where seldom is heard a word, discouraging or otherwise, and the skies can be the same white as the land all day.

The days we were up there in the car and on the train were our glimpse of the frozen tundra that is typical of the arctic elsewhere.



The German cruise ship AIDAaura is docked at the Bodø cruise terminal across the street from Bodø's NSB station, where our red train stretches along the platform awaiting our departure for Trondheim.



Before beginning its climb to Saltfjellet at the small town of Røkland, our train ran the first 50 miles out of Bodø along the Skjerstad Fjord. Closer to the coast, fjords rarely have ice. But here, near Rognan, we are farther inland and the fjord's salinity is lower because a larger percentage of the water comes from the river which enters the fjord at the upper end. In this case, the river is the Luonosjåhkå. The river's name comes not from the Norwegian language but from Sami, the indigenous people who herd reindeer across northern Scandinavia and Russia. Although I never heard the language spoken, Bodø seems to be on the southern edge of the region where bilingual public signs begin to appear. At the train station, the sign said Bodø and Bådåddjo.



Waiting on the platform at Dunderland, the first stop after descending from Saltfjellet, with conductor Harald Henriksen for the northbound Trondheim-Bodø train. Not only do the two trains meet here, but our train will swap café car attendants with the northbound train so that both will sleep in their own beds tonight. The conductor and driver – what we call the engineer in the United States – work north and south to the port city of Mo i Rana (moo ee rah-nah), spend the night in a home rented by the railroad, and return to their home base the next day. There is also a night train with two sleeping cars plus coaches and a café car each way between the two cities. Either way, the trip takes about 9½ hours. In 2012, the Norwegian television network NRK2 mounted video cameras in the locomotive of the northbound day train and filmed the entire trip four times – once each in winter, spring, summer and fall – and then showed it full-length without commercial interruption, seamlessly switching from season to season and giving viewers a day-long trip along one of the country’s most scenic rail lines. If you have 10 hours to kill, search “nordlandsbanen minutt for minutt” on YouTube and watch the full seasonal trip of your choice.