

Pulpit Rock

I blame the Hairy Bikers! Here we were, shivering on the back of a boat, a trickle of icy rain running down my neck, breath clouding the morning air, trying vainly to discern a glimpse of a craggy outcrop known as Pulpit Rock through the low cloud.

It had all started about a year ago when we watched a Hairy Bikers' TV show in which they cooked al fresco and toured Europe whilst frying, fricasseeing and flambeeing a selection of the native fauna. The programme opened with Si and Dave, hirsute, lumberjack shirts, sprawled on a flat rock that jutted out above a fjord that twinkled with sunlight hundreds of metres below. This was Pulpit Rock and it inspired us to book a cruise to Norway.

Our first disappointment was to discover that unless you were Bear Grylls on speed there was no way of accessing Pulpit Rock. As our guide explained, it took three or four hours to hike there from Stavanger and the final hour was closer to rock climbing than hiking. I can only assume that The Bikers had been airlifted in. If I had tried it I would have had to have been medivaced out. And so it was that my wife and I sat in a dining room on a cruise ship awaiting our boat trip to see the rock from below instead.

No-one is allowed on a cruise excursion without a numbered sticker. This must maritime law. When yellow 10 was called we dutifully joined the queue to disembark. The gang way was a wind tunnel, a precursor to the full force of a typical Norwegian spring morning. The rain stung your face and the temperature hovered a degree or two above freezing, it was barely light although it was ten in the morning. It was a miserable January day from Britain transplanted to the last day of April in Norway. The walk to our boat was short but long enough for a mass fumbling for brollies, hats and hoods amongst our soggy crocodile of passengers.

Once on the boat other problems took over. The boat was mercifully covered but all of the windows were steamed with condensation which seemed impervious to any degree of wiping with paper hankies, however vigorous. This mattered little to us however. Only passengers seated in the side seats had a window to look out off. 60% of us had seats in the centre of the boat and no access to a window, steamed up or not. For a sightseeing trip this did not auger well.

Our local guide was a cross between a stand up comedian and a Viking life coach. During the trip she would teach us how to relax by breathing properly, explain Norway's maternity package, extol the virtues of Norwegian lamb and sing us the Norwegian national anthem. Her real job was as an SAS air hostess but if she'd said that she was in the other SAS you might have believed her - she did have strapping shoulders.

Determining that we would see nothing from inside we ventured on deck with a few other intrepid souls. It was bracing but the rain had changed from torrential to merely heavy so we decided to stay a while. Finding shelter under an overhanging upper deck on the stern we watched the boat's engines churn up the slate grey waters of Lysefjord. Finally we arrived at Pulpit Rock. Soaked, semi-frozen and runny nosed we peered up through the driving rain. High up above us, shrouded in mist was the overhanging tongue of rock. As I peered at it, water running down my clammy cheeks I hoped that bloody Dave Myers and Si King were still up there, trying to do something interesting with a scrag end of reindeer.