

## **REPORT FROM SCANDINAVIA – NO. 2**

### Norway's Capital, Rugged Terrain Described By Student From Ishpeming

(EDITOR'S NOTE - This is the second in a series of special feature articles written by Vincent H. Malmstrom, of Ishpeming. As the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship grant to Norway, he will spend the coming year in research and travel in northern Europe. From time to time, The Mining Journal will publish his articles touching on the various phases of life in modern Scandinavia, in the belief that his observations as a geographer and fellow Upper Peninsulan may be of interest to its readers.)

BY VINCENT H. MALMSTROM

OSLO, Aug. 19 - Oslo is not only Norway's capital and largest city -- it is also one of the largest cities in the world if we consider its area.

Its population numbers something more than 430,000 (less than that of Minneapolis in 1940), but since 1948, when the surrounding district of Aker was annexed, Oslo has comprised a total area of 178 square miles. This annexation has not only facilitated the extension of public services into Oslo's growing suburbs, but it has also meant that the people of Oslo will have a great natural playground close at hand, since over two-thirds of this area will remain in forests, lakes and mountains.

#### **900th Anniversary**

The 1950 visitor to Oslo has the added satisfaction of taking part in the city's 900th anniversary, for it was about 1050 that the first permanent settlements were made in the Oslo area. As you might expect, this long and continuous history has given Oslo a variety of faces -- the medieval Gamlebyen, or Old City, in the east; the section behind Akershus castle which marked the city's relocation after the disastrous fire of 1624; the tightly packed factories and dwellings that grew up in the wake of the Industrial Revolution along the Aker river; and, much more pleasing to the eye, the modern, garden-like suburbs and the newly-remodeled center of the city. Here, forming the very heart of the Oslo of the future, is the strikingly modern town hall, or Rådhuset. Opened for the first time last May 17, the Oslo Rådhuset is without question one of the most beautiful public buildings in the world.

Oslo is Norway's capital in the classic European sense of the word. It is not only the political nerve center of the nation but it is also the greatest commercial hub in the country. Through Oslo pass 50 per cent of all Norway's imports and 18 per cent of all her exports. Within four hours' travel time from Oslo lives one-half of Norway's total population. Here are most of the nation's diversified industries. The artistic and intellectual lives of Norway find their focus here. Oslo is to Norway what New York City and Washington rolled into one would be to the United States.

## **Transportation Picture**

But important as it is, Oslo is not Norway. For a truer picture of Norwegian life and culture, one must visit the rural districts of the country -- the farming regions, the small seaport towns, the isolated valleys and the rugged mountains. During the past few weeks I have had occasion to travel through the Norwegian countryside, but before I describe some of these rural tours, I think I should say a bit about travel in Norway, and more specifically the roads and railroads.

When you realize that 72 per cent of the entire country is bare-rock mountain-land (the Norwegians call it *fell*), you are immediately impressed by how many roads there actually are. While it is true that more than one-fourth of all Norwegian farms have no road connections whatsoever, it is amazing that some of the precarious mountain roads that do exist could have been built at all. Costs of construction and maintenance are enormous. Because of Norway's northern latitude and the height of the mountains, most of the roads are closed by snow throughout the winter and spring, giving some valleys access to the outside world only from May to early November.

## **Drama On The Highways**

For the most part, Norwegian roads are narrow, averaging about 11 feet in width, and are surfaced with gravel. Since there are no shoulders along the roads, meeting on-coming traffic creates a minor crisis for all concerned. One bus in which I was riding actually forced a car into the ditch where it teetered at a 45-degree angle until we could get past. Once we had slipped by, all able-bodied male passengers jumped out to help right the ditched automobile. Fortunately, this particular encounter took place in relatively flat, wooded country and not on the edge of some precipitous cliff. When you meet on a mountain road, you sometimes feel that an extra coat of paint on either vehicle would make the difference between getting by or not.

Narrowness is not the only, characteristic of Norwegian roads, however. In order to ascend many mountains sides, tortuous hairpin curves become necessary, some of them so sharp a bus will have to stop and back up in order to make the turn. With approaching traffic largely obscured from view, an additional element of suspense is added to the drama of Norway's highways.

## **Railways Equally Amazing**

The railroads of Norway are just as amazing if not quite as spectacular as the road system. Almost all of the railways in the country are owned by the government -- and for very good reason. No private enterprise could bear the expense of such difficult construction and maintenance. Moreover, the service is surprisingly good. The rolling stock is rather antiquated but the volume and speed of the traffic that moves along the single-track lines is quite phenomenal. In a country so richly endowed with hydroelectric power it seems strange that only one-sixth of the total mileage has yet been electrified,

My first weekend tour took me into the Hedmark region north of Oslo. On this excursion I passed through Eidsvoll where the Norwegian constitution was signed in 1814 and northward to the shores of Mjøsa, Norway's largest lake. In Hamar I visited the ruins of the famous 12th century cathedral and saw extensive archeological excavations being made

### **Visits Poet's Home**

Then, going on to Lillehammer by bus, I visited the home of one of Norway's greatest poets, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and that of Sigrid Undset, the authoress. Also in Lillehammer I toured the Sandvig Collections of old Norwegian homesteads, an experience which takes the present-day visitor back into the days of 12th and 13th century Norway by surrounding him with the actual houses, farms and authentic furnishings of that period. I believe that a visit to these collections is a "must" for anyone interested in Norwegian history. It is said that Sigrid Undset derived part of the inspiration for her Nobel prize-winning work, "Kristin Lavransdatter," from visiting these collections. Certainly it is not difficult to imagine the scenes from her book taking place against such a back-drop of medieval authenticity.

A second weekend trip took me to Sandefjord, south of Oslo near the mouth of the Oslofjord. I spent the weekend there as the guest of Consul and Mrs. Lars Christensen, a family long active in whaling. Sandefjord together with the other Vestfold towns of Larvik and Tønsberg comprise the three most important ports of the Norwegian whaling fleet. The floating factories were back from the Antarctic for the summer, and it was my good fortune to spend a night on board one of them.

### **Importance Of Whaling**

Whaling constitutes some 50 to 150 million Norwegian kroner a year in terms of revenue derived (between seven and 20 million dollars annually) and consequently is of considerable economic importance to Norway. Of 16 floating factories active in the Antarctic last year, 10 were Norwegian and six came from the port of Sandefjord alone.

The ships leave Norway early in November each year, arriving in Antarctic waters ready to begin whaling about Christmas time. They work throughout the southern hemisphere summer and return with their cargo of whale oil about June. What with the present world shortage of fats, Norwegian whale oil finds a ready market for such uses as margarine and soap.

Besides inspecting the whaling ships however, I visited the whaling museum donated to the city of Sandefjord by Consul Christensen in honor of his father, the pioneer Antarctic whaler. The Christensen family has also done much for the geographic exploration of Antarctica, and a casual glance at a map of the region will reveal coastlines of that continent named for each member of the family. In nearby Tønsberg I saw the

monument of Svend Føyn, the inventor of the explosive harpoon and at Gokstad we visited the burial mound in which one of the oldest Viking ships in existence was found.

### **Hydro-Electric Station**

My tour into Numedal west of Oslo brought me into the edge of Norway's rugged mountain country. Here, at the far end of the valley, lies the Nore hydroelectric station that supplies part of the electricity for the city of Oslo. Seven great penstocks or tubes lead the waters of a high mountain lake 1,200 feet over the side of a cliff into the generating plant below. This tremendous head of water is directed through seven turbines, generating a total of 90,000 kilowatts of power. The water is used again in a second plant some 330 feet lower down in the valley, generating another 50,000 kw.

Though Nore may sound terribly large by our Upper Peninsula standards, there is the famous set of plants near Rjukan farther west that produce some 420,000 kilowatts. If this same amount of electricity had to be generated from coal, one would need more than 2,000,000 tons, or more than the present import total for the whole of Norway. This gives some idea of the relative importance of hydroelectric power in terms of the Norwegian economy. It is estimated that Norway's potential hydroelectric capacity is 12.3 million kilowatts and up to now only 2.8 million kilowatts have been developed. Modern science has at last made the rugged Norwegian mountains yield a resource to the people who have struggled so long to make a living on their barren slopes.

### **Journey Through Plateau**

Talking of barren slopes leads me quite naturally to the Hardanger Vidda, a part of which we crossed on our way back from Nore. This vidda, or plateau region, lies about 3,000 feet high and extends from near Numedal almost to the coast in the west. Because of its elevation and latitude, this entire region lies above the tree-line, the only vegetation being grasses and dwarf birches. It is just as though a part of Lappland or Finnmark had been transported south and dropped in southern Norway, for what elevation and latitude cooperate to produce in the Hardanger Vidda is duplicated by latitude alone in northern Norway. The Hardanger Vidda even has its reindeer herds, but unfortunately I did not see any of these.

Another weekend was spent in Telemark and the Setesdal. But these are stories in themselves. At the moment I am looking forward very much to my tour in central and southern Sweden and Denmark.

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