

St. Olav Ways II - St.Olavsleden

Encounters along the way
From Selånger to Trondheim in 27 days

Michael Schildmann

A Pilgrim Diary
with all the
Original Maps and
Tracks on the road

Foreword by
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Thank you to my wife and my daughter

The translation was created with the help of DeepL, a very helpful translation programm, and was then further revised. I apologize for any translation errors.

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Why do I pilgrimage, why do I not hike? (16.07. / 11.day)

My travel stages

Foreword

A few years ago, when I led a pilgrimage from Skanstugan in Sweden via Stiklestad to Trondheim in Norway, a group of retired women followed us across the Swedish border. At one point I asked them what they were associating with the word „pilgrim“. After much thought, a woman said, „It's a celebration!“ I think it was a nice answer that contains a good punch line: : Pilgrimage is something solemn, „to walk before God“, that is „with raised hearts to the Lord“, as we called the communion ritual in the early Church: „Raise your hearts to the Lord, let us praise His name“. Suddenly the familiar words become very concrete: wandering in the inner and outer landscape becomes the same: a celebration of creation.

Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in his diary „Markings“: „The longest journey is the journey to the inside“. In other words, we must begin with ourselves. This is where the actual pilgrimage begins on the way in. If we are far enough, we feel a connection with all human beings at all times and with all living beings, all things of nature.

And we don't necessarily have to travel to Jerusalem, Rome or Santiago de Compostela. Scandinavia has several beautiful pilgrimage routes, not least to the old holy place, the Nidaros Cathedral. Trondheim is the „Santiago de Compostela of the North“, because of the legend of Olav the Saint in the Nidaros Cathedral. Pilgrims from all over Europe come here on pilgrimage, and it is my duty as a pilgrims pastor to welcome them at the destination of their pilgrimage during the summer.

So I met Michael Schildmann for the first time in 2010, when he had walked all the way from Oslo crossing the mountains to Nidaros Cathedral. We told each other our life and faith stories and spoke about the Word of God and went together to the Lord's Supper in the small Mariachapel inside the cathedral. Suddenly, in summer 2012, the German pilgrim reappeared at the Pilgrim Centre after a successful pilgrimage through the Swedish forests from Selånger in Sweden on St. Olavsleden. Finally our paths crossed again in 2013, in a pilgrims' hostel on the „Haervejen „ - the „Danish Camino“.

Now Michael Schildmann has given us this book „St. Olavs Ways II - St. Olavsleden - from Selånger to Trondheim“. The book contains diary entries with reflections, encounters, historical facts and beautiful photos of churches and the magnificent landscape. It is an inspiring gift for anyone who wants to make an outer and inner journey.

Elisabeth Lidell
Pilgrim pastor, Århus

„What's the matter with you?“ - Why I did I start again?

In the year 2007 the pilgrim „virus“ seized me, the need to leave home. Today, after eight pilgrimages, pilgrimage means for me: return. It's a return to silence, unlike the silence at home. It is rather a return to me, the desire to be outside the normal time and world. I don't even know exactly who or what I'm looking for. I don't think there's any „Blue Flower“ like in romance. An inner restlessness drives me, a need for vastness, as I find it in the Scandinavian nature. At the same time it has become the search for my religious identity. I doubt the God of my childhood and youth, of whom I read in the Bible and heard from the pulpit. Sometimes I despair of the contradictions of the Bible and its interpretations. I am looking for „evidence“ and of course find none.

On my way I visited every church along the way, but especially in Norway and Sweden I often stood in front of a locked door. It almost seemed to me that the church didn't want me. As if I should not find a place that gives me the time and the rest to approach God, to enter into conversation with „Him“.

To be fair, I have to admit that I often passed by the churches even at „impossible“ times. So it is certainly also partly my fault. And I had to reach Åre until I could take part in a service.

St. Olavsleden is the northernmost pilgrim path in the world, extending from the Baltic sea to the Atlantic sea, through Sweden to Norway. So it would be nice if more churches on the pilgrim path opened their doors - or offer a key nearby. I found churches open in Selånger, Mörsil, Borgsjöbyn, Hallandsgården, Åre and Stiklestad.

Olaf II. of Norway / Norwegian name: Olav

Catholic memorial day: 29 July

Evangelical memorial day: 29 July

The name means: offspring of the ancestors (Swedish - Scandinavian)

King of Norway, Martyr

**** 995 west of the Oslofjord in Norway***

† 29 July 1030 near Stiklestad near Levanger in Norway

There is a statue at the east portal of the cathedral in Uppsala in Sweden, 13th century. Olaf, son of the Viking small king Harald Graenske, who died before his birth, and the aristocratic daughter Ásta, grew up with his stepfather, the small king Sigurd Syre of Ringerike in Oppland. At that time the Vikings made the coasts of Europe unsafe as pirates; at the age of twelve years also Olaf got a ship, His robber journeys led him 1007 to 1009 into the Baltic Sea, 1009 to 1011 to Denmark, Holland and England, where he conquered Canterbury, then for a time he was in the service of king Ethelred II. and Christianity became acquainted. On his forays he went as far as Gibraltar, where he had a vision promising him the throne of Norway.

1013 / 14 Olaf was christened in Rouen, Normandy. Soon afterwards he returned to his homeland and set out with 220 men of retinue, some priests and a bishop to put his vision into practice: through cooperation and skill he united the many small kingdoms in Norway, expelled the Danes in the battle of Nesjar - today the town of Larvik - and in 1016 was proclaimed king in all of Norway. The subsequent

unification of the empire was achieved by naming local representatives of the king and setting up a central court administration based on the English model and a church organisation subordinated to the Archbishop of Bremen-Hamburg.

Olav called missionaries into the country, had churches built and punishments introduced for all people who refused baptism. He had idols and pagan sanctuaries destroyed, in open field battles, which were often understood as God's judgment, he fought the opponents of Christianity. The Christianization was accompanied by the civilisational development. The new laws of St.

Olaf remained in force for centuries; among other things, they ensured the livelihood of the priests, ordered rest from work on Sundays and holidays, and prohibited marriage among close relatives.

Olaf's marriage to Astrid, the daughter of King Olav I of Sweden, also brought him to his side. But from 1025/26 the Danish king Knud - also by bribery and promises - made most of the mighty men of the country Olaf abstenttig. At the same time, resistance to central rule and Olaf's often rude methods grew. Knud came to Norway in 1027 with an English-Danish fleet and defeated Olaf in the battle at the mouth of the Helgeå; Olaf had to flee with his son Magnús to his brother-in-law, Jaroslav I. v. Kiev, to Weliki Nowgorod.

Olaf then gathered a new army around him in Sweden, with which he set off against Trondheim. In 1030, while attempting to regain his empire, he fell in the battle of Stiklestad against Knud's partisans, according to tradition with the battle cry: Forward, Christian men, crucifix men, king men! The legend tells how Olav asked for a drink of water before the battle; blessed by the bishop, it turned into beer, which Olav did not want to drink because it was fast

day; a second drink of water was turned into honey mead and again rejected by him; but when the water, which was brought in the third time, turned into wine, Olav drank, after the bishop had expressly ordered it to him.

Olaf was soon considered a saint. Disappointment with Knud's unfulfilled promises and bitterness over the strict rule of his son Svein Álfifason, who was appointed king, promoted Olaf's veneration. Even in the hymn to the winner of the battle, King Svend Knudson, it says: „Olaf saved his soul sinlessly before he died. Olaf's bones were transferred to the Clemenschurch in Trondheim in the summer of 1031, and at the end of the 11th century the cathedral in Trondheim was built in his honour, the largest Scandinavian church and seat of the Norwegian archbishops. Soon pilgrimages developed, Olaf became a saint of the empire and of the people, following the example of English kings. During the Reformation the golden Olav shrine was brought to Denmark, the relics were destroyed. In the 12th century a Latin story of suffering and miracle legends were written under the title Ólafs saga helga. Together with Knud of Denmark and Erik of Sweden, Olaf was one of the three great kings and missionaries of the north.

Day 1 - From Selånger to Gålviken



Sundsvall

is a port city on the Gulf of Bothnia with about 45,000 inhabitants. It is close to the geographical centre of Sweden. In the south and north there are the two city mountains Södra Berget (240 m) and Norra Berget (141 m).

In 1621, Gustav II Adolf of Sweden transferred the town charter to Sundsvall. Today it is present as a statue on the market square in the city. - In the 19th century Sundsvall recorded a strong population growth and in 1887 it had 10,726 inhabitants. At that time the city had the highest sawmill density in the world. - Sundsvall was hit four times by big fires, the first time in 1721 after a bombardment by Russian troops and the last time on 25 June 1888. Only stone houses were allowed to be built in the centre. - In 2010 a specimen of a mirror of Saxony from the year 1481 was found in the municipal library.

The central attraction is Stenstaden, the „stone town“ around the Stora Torget market square. - A beautiful view down to Sundsvall is offered from the Norra Berget (141 m). Here you will find the open-air museum, the crafts museum and the maritime museum. - The Högom cemetery, about 2 km from the city centre, is the largest cemetery in northern Sweden (400-550 AD). It comprises eleven burial mounds and a rune stone. - The Nordic Chamber Orchestra, formed in 1990, is the youngest professional chamber orchestra in Scandinavia.

Selånger

is a historical district of Sundsvall and the name of the local parish. In the Middle Ages it was the port and the centre of Medelpad. According to tradition, it was here that Olav the saint came ashore when he returned home from Gardarike

(Russia) in 1030, and from here he started his march to Stiklestad. Therefore it was the most important starting point for the pilgrimage to Nidaros. It runs along a chain of Olav springs, via Medelpad, Jämtland and Trøndelag. According to popular tradition, this harbour was located below the present church ruins. Selånger is named as one of six royal courts in Norrland and the seat of the bailiff. In 1780 a new church was built in neoclassical style, replacing the old one. It's a ruin today.

At the beginning of the 17th century, Sundsvall was founded and gradually took over the leading position in the region. The Kungsnäs peninsula in Selånger with its old royal court was used for a long time as the seat of the governor because of its central and convenient location.

Mattfors

is a town in the district Västernorrland with about 3200 inhabitants at the river Ljungan.

Olav spring

A connection between St. Olav and water can be traced back to the spring that originated from his grave. Later the Olav Fountain at Nidaros Cathedral was added. But many of the „Olavs“ sources are probably much older and were connected to St. Olav in Christian times. The springs were certainly an important support for the pilgrims on their way to Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim.

05./06.07 Laila

I have known Laila for quite some time from e-mail contacts.

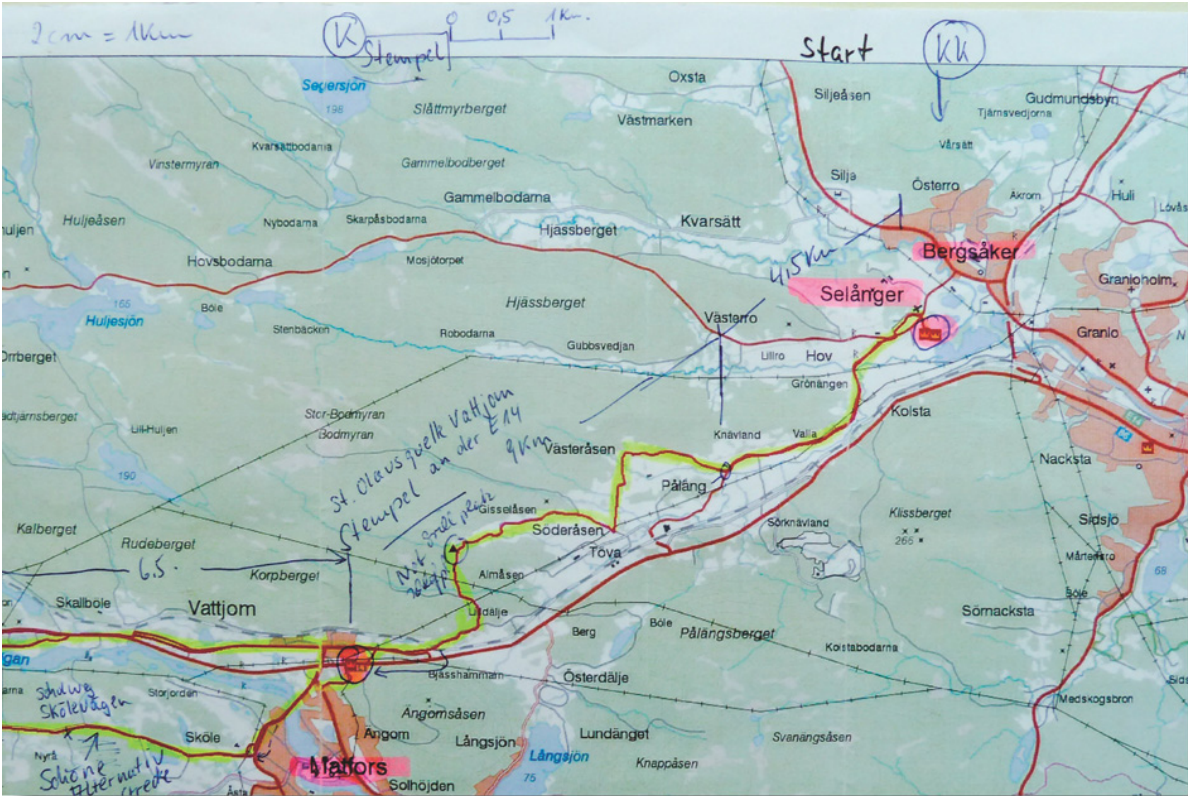
While I am already driving through Sweden on the bus, I contact Laila by SMS - she had offered me accommodation

in Sundsvall or in Selånger. So I'd like to give her my estimated time of arrival. But the bus driver is not sure when we will arrive at Stockholm Central Station. So it's uncertain if I'll reach any of the trains on my list at all. So I just text her where I am and that I'll call her later with an exact time of arrival. From the train from Stockholm to Sundsvall I send her another text, again without exact time, because the train will arrive late for reasons unknown to me. I have to reckon with a delay of thirty to sixty minutes, some of my fellow travellers tell me. I'll pass that on to Laila. I don't want her standing at the station unnecessarily early. She confirms and writes that she would be there.

I'm lucky at the station in Stockholm. Very quickly I get out of the bus, grab my rucksack and shortly afterwards I'm already standing at the ticket counter in the station. Time seems short while I'm standing in line. The big station clock doesn't even give me four minutes. Finally it's my turn - and I get the last ticket for today to Sundsvall. I can pay by credit card, I don't have any cash yet.

Is there such a thing in Germany at all? Sold out, no more tickets for a trip from A to B? By the way, it is a first class ticket and therefore significantly more expensive than my whole trip from Oldenburg to Stockholm. In the train, however, I soon notice the advantages of such a first-class ticket: very comfortable seats, my own train attendant, a small kitchen with coffee, tea and chocolate, plus biscuits, muffins and fruit. But I don't order „real“ food - you could also get it here - at the moment I'm full. So it's no big deal that I still don't have any cash.

As before on the bus ride, forest passes by outside, rarely once a house, even more rarely several houses or a village. Often they are houses that are distributed along a lake shore, holiday homes or permanent residences - I can't tell the difference. From time to time the train stops in a station, people get off, new passengers don't get on anymore. Around eleven p.m., the train slows down again, stops.



Map 1+2

Now I get out too, search the platform with my eyes, where could Laila be? But nobody stands around waiting, everyone who has waited before approaches one of my fellow travellers. At the end of the platform I cross the tracks and want to walk over to the station building. Then I see her, a small gesture is enough, a smile, I walk towards her, greet her, also greet the man next to her. It's her husband, she's introducing us. I can load my luggage into the silver-grey Mercedes and off we go in the direction of Selånger. Meanwhile, despite the long midsummer nights, it has become dusky, the sun has set.

On the way Laila asks what the journey was like, explains that she found a cheap hostel with a woman in the village for me, that she wanted to show me the ruin tomorrow, asks when I will probably come to the office. Soon we are standing in front of an older Swedish cottage. From the house opposite a woman comes over to us, it is the owner who welcomes us very warmly. As she shows us the house, from the kitchen to the bathroom, she tells us that she and her husband have repaired this old house, the house of her parents, and have only recently rented it out; it dates from the 18th century.

It's nice, I could live here - at least a few days, maybe a few weeks. But my mind is after departure, not after lingering. The house reminds me of my grandparents' summer house. Like this house (and most of the houses I see here), it is made of wood and exudes a charm of its own. The furnishings, the atmosphere, everything brings back memories of my childhood holidays. When my parents travelled, we were often „allowed“ to spend the holidays with my grandparents at a lake in northern Germany. Sometimes even when they weren't out of town. Then it could also happen that I was allowed to be alone with my grandparents. Since I have four siblings, it was of course especially nice to have the attention and devotion of my grandparents for me alone. Long walks around the lake or

also trips with the rowing boat were a wonderful pastime. Especially the bottle Bluna or Fanta and a piece of cake at a stop on the way attracted. That was pure luxury back then.

Selånger - the new church from 1780
Starting point of my pilgrimage



Then I am alone, I don't feel like anything anymore, but I'm be hungry. So I prepare a Mexican rice dish from the bag, two cups of tea and a cup of vegetable broth. Afterwards I can't sleep, I'm much too excited, I'm looking forward to the road ahead and I can't wait for Laila's lead. In this dusky night I walk towards the church and finally also to the ruin, take some photos, too. There is a very special feeling of expectation in me again. I couldn't put it into words right now, but I feel it. It is a departure into the unknown, also into my own unknown. After one o'clock in the morning I finally lie in bed. I can't keep my eyes open anymore.

The next morning I meet Laila in the parish office, it is close to the „new“ church. She already has my pilgrim passport ready, she also printed out a set of seven detailed maps for me. „You can find your way around with that for the next few days,“ she says with a smile. When she sees my other maps for the whole route through Sweden and Norway, she is reassured. I have the impression she's afraid I might get lost. I'm not so worried myself. Lena had already sent me maps as a digital file before I left Oldenburg. The two women probably know each other from working together on and for the pilgrimage. Lena has also given her a list of overnight accommodations for me for the Jämtland section. It's amazing and enjoyable how they take care of me. Great kindness and respect are shown to the pilgrim here.

In bright sunshine Laila leads me through the church and then to the ruin. Olav is said to have arrived here in 1030 from Russia with a small group of men (Selånger was still by the sea at that time) and then left for Norway. Now I'm leaving this place, too, following in his footsteps. Almost 1,000 years ago. Later, many pilgrims used this trade route

as a way to the cathedral of Nidaros. Do I feel anything of the historical significance of this place? I mean, yeah. Therefore it means a lot to me to be on such historical paths.

Leila quickly shows me a special place on map 6 (or 2 in my own set) - I read Gålviken on the map. „This is where my brother lives. He'll be happy if you spend the night with him. And that you may find him, (he lives down by the lake,) he will put up a sign ‚Pilgrim‘ at the top of the road. Then you know, here I have to go down to the lake,“ Laila explains to me. So she's already taken care of my next overnight stay. The tent, which I carry with me again, makes me feel safe even without a destination hostel.

Things are going well on this sunny day. The landscape is beautiful, maybe a little too much road. But then, fortunately, the road turns off onto a gravel road and winds its way through the valley on narrow paths. At some point I cross the highway, follow it for a few hundred meters and reach the Olav's spring near Matfors. I drink from the cool water, also fill up my bottle. It's almost four o'clock, but I'm still walking on map 1 - and haven't reached the edge of the map yet. However, Gålviken is on map 2, at the end of the third quarter of the map. There's still a long way to go. I'm beginning to doubt whether I can reach Laila's brother today. But I have my tent.

My way gets lost in a cleared forest area. After some searching I finally find a marker and return to civilization at the local museum of Matfors.

Around seven o'clock at night I realize that it won't work out like this. I need to find a place for my tent. Unfortunately it was drizzling in between and the mosquitoes have become very annoying. I can't find any free places either. My question to a farmer's wife whether I should be allowed to pitch my tent on her premises is fearfully rejected. There aren't any more houses. Finally I turn off the „main road“ and go down to a small lake. At the first house there is no

car, I don't ring the bell at all, at the second house nothing moves, at the third there are only old cars, nobody opens the door. Finally I stop on a flat open space near the first house, step down the grass and pitch up my tent. When I want to prepare food, I notice that I only have a little water left, too little to cook with and drink from. So I ring the bell at the first house. It's inhabited, an older woman with her dog is at home. She fills my water bottle, also inquires where I sleep. I'll show her the tent, we can see it from her house. Back at the tent I unpack the stove, try to screw on the gas cartridge, they don't fit together: I bought the wrong cartridges! Me, as a „tried and tested“ pilgrim, does not try out his cartridge before leaving home. How stupid can one be, how inattentive? So there is no hot food tonight - and the mosquitoes are annoying.

When I notice that I forgot my toilet bag in the bathroom of the last/first hostel, a first „collapse“ occurs. Usually it took a few days until the first great self-doubt set in. A kind of depression that I have to overcome every time. But that I did not expect so early. What can I do now? Large cities may have these Campinggaz cartridges in outdoor shops. However, I had already read in an Internet forum that Scandinavia usually uses a different system. So the situation is difficult. In my distress, I'll call Laila. Maybe I can persuade her to bring me back so that I can go to Sundsvall tomorrow and...

The situation develops differently: Laila is happy to hear from me and asks if I have already arrived with her brother. When I describe where I am and how long I think the rest of the way will take, she wonders. „It's probably only five or six kilometers from where you are,“ she says. Regarding the problem with the cartouche, she says: „My brother will certainly be able to help you. I'm baking right now, it'll take two or three hours. But then I'll go to him and bring your bag.“ I hesitate, I can't believe that I such a mistake, but I don't want to insist on it any longer and I agree that I will try

to reach her brother. If necessary, she'd meet me and take me with her. I too hope that perhaps her brother... But in the end it is a self-inflicted problem, which I have to take care of myself, for whose solution I cannot involve other people.

I take down my tent, stuff everything into my backpack and climb up to the road again - and follow it. Curve after curve, hill up and down again. You wouldn't notice it in the car, but they make me sweat, those constant climbs. I „am boiling with heat“, have the poncho only over my backpack, because fortunately it is no longer drizzling. Instead, the mosquitoes are now haunting me. As sweaty as I am, I don't think that applying cream will have much chance of success. And lowering my pants all the way down? That makes it all the more hot. And so I walk, turn around from time to time and think: „Maybe Laila is coming.“ But it's always other cars overtaking me. And I don't get ahead. Meanwhile I use her more accurate maps, but that doesn't change the basic problem of distance, even makes it abundantly clear to me: „You'll never make it!“ And by the way, that's too much road, especially on the first day, so many kilometers! Even if you can walk a road faster than a narrow path through the forest.

Around ten o'clock in the evening I decide to stop a car - only nobody drives in my direction. All the cars are coming towards me now. After another ten or fifteen minutes, an SUV finally approaches, driving in my direction, I stretch out my hand, turn my face to it, hoping for support from my pilgrim symbol. Yeah, he's stopping. The driver grins as he listens to my story. He could be a road patrol driver. I can get on board. Together we're trying to find the pilgrim sign, go back, but nothing. Did Laila's brother remove it again? Besides, I don't even have his address. Gålviken, that's all I know. So I'll call Laila again, it's busy. My phone rings right after that, it's Laila. She asks, „Where are you?“ I say, „We can't find your brother.“ „I'm with him,“ she wonders, „but

where are you now?" So I pass the phone on to Lars, my „savior“.

Now we know: we started searching too late, Gålviken starts long before the name on the map. Then it only takes a few minutes and we stand at the pilgrim sign, I get out, thank Lars and walk down the road to the lake. Laila and her brother meet me on a quad. She jumps down down and he drives back. Together we walk down the path to her brother's house. He doesn't seem averse to opening his guesthouse to pilgrims. Anyway, I have the honor of being the first guest he's offered. After unpacking and showering I can cook my dinner in the main building. Finally we all sit around the big table, inside, because of the mosquitoes, and we tell, laugh and drink coffee. So the day comes to a nice end after all.

At some point Laila sets off and drives back to her husband, I go down to the lake, through a paradisiacal flowering meadow, and enjoy the end of the sunset. Later I sit in my house and write my diary. This is a very great need for me, as it enables me to look back on what I have experienced and thus to experience and remember more intensely and more clearly.

The next day reality is just around the corner: It's raining! Her brother can't help me with the gas cartridge and I have given up the idea to return to Sundsvall. But inside I am calm again and think it is as it is. So I run off conscious of bearing the consequences for my own mistake. In my mind I hope for the right cartridge in Östersund. And knee „says“: „I don't want to experience such a day again, please hold back a bit - in speed and length of the way.“

Day 2 - From Gålviken to Viskan

