



"Nobody will know that you were a beauty, a sweet sweet beauty, but so stone cold!" - Rolling Stones

# STONE COLD BEAUTY

PHOTOSTORY BY  
TOR JOHNSON  
AND JEFF DIVINE

Like a beautiful, capricious girl, she gave us a little glimpse of a world of intense beauty, then she turned around and walked away, leaving us begging in the cold. Maybe we didn't have the right respect, or the right timing. Maybe we weren't dedicated enough. Maybe she was just playing with us?







TON JOHNSON



When you step off the plane in Norway, the first thing you notice is that everything is immaculate, and it all works flawlessly. OK, maybe the first thing you notice is the biting wind that goes right through you. The second thing will probably be a gorgeous blond girl who's taller than you are. So let's say you get over those things. Then you realise you're in what's possibly the most sorted place in the world. These are the people who used to be the greatest whalers in the world, the ones who now have oil exports second only to Saudi Arabia. And they still have clear water (not too many whales though). You travel to the far north, to where you'd expect to see igloos, and instead there are perfect roads and convenience stores. It's the exact opposite of a third world tropical surf trip. It's like the Norwegians can't do anything half-way. The vicious Arctic elements must have made a natural selection of them: The sloppy or lazy ones forgot to chop wood for the winter and they all died. Hoping that the same elements might select out the hordes of surfers at our tepid home breaks, a few of us decided to go north of the Arctic Circle. The Arctic Circle is a far-from-arbitrary line that marks the first point north where the sun never rises in the dead of winter, or sets in the summer. Why go there? The whole trip just begs the question. Why endure the biting cold, fickle conditions, and incredible expense, to go surfing in Norway?



JEFF DAVINE





JEFF DRYNE

**W**ell, to begin with, there was the photo. Jørgen Michaelssen and his partner Thomas Olsen run Norway's only surf shop, "Surfcentrum" in Stavanger. To Norway's tiny surfing population, this is Newport Beach. Business is booming, and they're selling boards as fast as they ship them in. Yet most of Norway's thousands of miles of very exposed coastline is still unexplored, and there are countless superb breaks out there that haven't yet been seen. Stavanger locals had been telling us about a left point up there that breaks like Mundaka, with a J-Bay on the other side. "Ya, sure", we said. Then we saw the grainy photocopy on the wall of the surf shop. Photos may speak a thousand words, but this one just said "You want to ride this eight foot left. Now."



JØRGEN MICHAELSSON

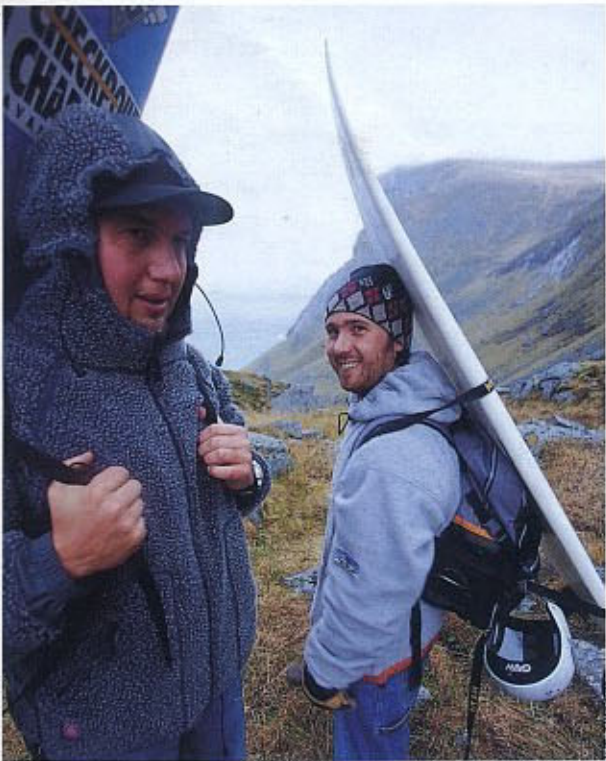




TOM JOHNSON

Surfing in Norway began around Stavanger about twenty years back, when a few overseas oil rig workers on leave noticed the clean beach breaks and hollow reefs that pepper the coast here. The locals were right there with them. Roar Berge was one of the first Norwegians to start, and he still has that same pioneering attitude. When we first met Roar, he offered to show us a few local spots, so we piled into his car. Pulling up at the beach we found a grand total of three guys riding a nice right point. "Let's go somewhere else", Roar said, "It's crowded out there already".

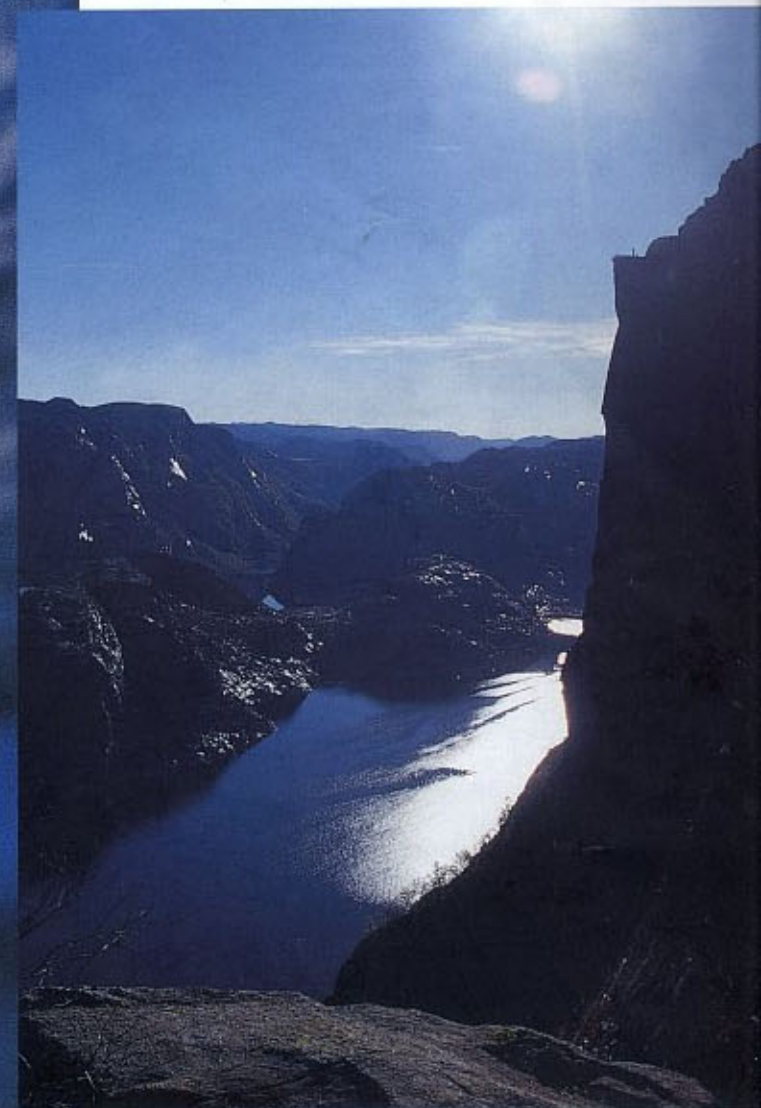
Back in the early eighties Roar got it into his head to go surfing, so he took a trip to England for one reason- to buy a surfboard. The prize he returned with was a Bing twin-fin with knife rails and fins so far back you can stand it on it's tail. He watched films of surfing to see how it was done, but there were problems. Since the few surfers in the area were oil workers, they would be on the rigs at sea most of the time, so Roar was the only surfer around. He had no one to show him those things we take for granted, like leashes. He nearly severed his leg at the ankle using a solid rope home-made leash in the punchy local beach breaks. Undaunted, he kept right on experimenting, and he remains one of the keenest surfers around. The Bing is still kept safe and warm in his workshop. Now Roar's sons are getting into it, and he goes to the beach surrounded by tow-headed groms who are just as stoked as he is.



TOM JOHNSON







**T**here are still so few surfers in Norway that nearly everyone knows each other. The mood has changed since the days when Roar would chase after a car with boards on the roof just to find someone to surf with, but even now it's so mellow the locals don't even bother to shut their car doors when they go out. The locals are stoked to share their waves, and they'll even show you their spots (well, they might keep a few gems back).

All this may be changing. A Californian named Greg Munson, whom I remember as a guy called "Squirrel" who rode full length Coca Cola and American flag logo boards, came over last year with stories about his surf media connections and world class surfing status. A few were impressed, and took him north to one of their most prized secret breaks. He trashed his rental car, caused thousands of dollars of damage in the oceanfront cottage they set him up in, then left town. The sort of thing you might get away with in LA, not in a town of fifty where everyone knows what you had for breakfast before you eat it.

Our friend Christian, who was one of the first to ever surf the extreme North, came back on his next trip and was told that they "don't rent to surfers any more". "Californians," Thomas told me almost apologetically "they tell you what you want to hear".

JEFF DOWNE



**W**ith the cold and the fickle conditions, it's not likely to get overwhelmingly crowded in Norway. That said, a good wetsuit makes it easy.

Advances in wetsuit design have thrown open the doors to surfing in colder climates, effectively increasing the number of waves we can ride in places like Norway. With a zipperless wetsuit, built of the new flexible materials with sealed seams, you can surf in places where you'd have been miserable a few years back.

We surfed a place in the far North - I'll call "Rigor Mortis". It was early afternoon, with the low Arctic fall sun already setting, I paddled out fully encased in a new 5-4-3 mm, built in hood, a pair of gloves, and boots. A squall moved in off the Norwegian Sea, dusting the jagged peaks of the glacial bowl on either side of us with snow. The whole scene was so beautiful, cold, and brutal as to be almost scary. Yet I was perfectly warm and comfortable. It was the strangest contrast, to be comfortable in such a cold place, like I was somehow cheating.

We spent a ridiculous amount of time and money getting to the far North in search of the wave on the wall of Thomas' and Jørgen's shop, yet we never got it the way we wanted it. It's an incredibly beautiful place, and we saw the tantalising long lines sweep into the bay, but it just didn't quite happen. Maybe if we came back and waited around for it. Maybe...







On the way to the plane back in Stavenger, we stopped at the beach to take a last look at the waves. Just as we topped the dunes the sun burst out of the clouds on perfect lefts cracking along a white sand beach. She was teasing us one last time. Or maybe she saying goodbye.

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