

## Shore Scene

## PETER'S FRIENDS

In the Faroes, you don't have to motor miles offshore to find fish, as **Peter McGroary** and his friends discover.

Five pints of Carlsberg Special and a second slice of two-year-old pilot whale blubber had me sitting very comfortable in the Faroese evening sun. It was the beautiful month of May and the middle of a national boat festival in the town of Westmana on one of that little group of Norse islands in the middle of the north Atlantic that is the Faroe Isles. As the beer flowed the town came to life around the marina where the marquee had been erected and as the sun went down we drifted to the ubiquitous Irish Pub and then to the town's disco where great physical effort was made in displaying our unique dancing to the locals. Riverdance it wasn't. A Tourette's afflicted, Carlsberg-soaked Flatley, maybe.

Lured by tales of monstrous plaice, a disparate group of us had followed in the footsteps of those other visiting Irish visionaries, St Brendan and er... Brian Kerr and landed upon Faroese soil. We were going to be fishing aboard the local charter boat Blastein, owned naturally enough by Magni Blastein, a born and bred Westmanian with an excellent knowledge of the plaice, and indeed other species that hunt the waters hereabout.

On our first night of Magni took us to the local fishery training college and gave us a PowerPoint presentation on what the fishing was like in the area. With no Common Fisheries Policy to have made a mess of their territorial waters, he was able to demonstrate that absolutely top class sea fishing was available only a short steam from the harbour. Okay, the size of the fish wasn't up to Norwegian standards, but compared to back home they were brutes. But what really struck me was that how you didn't have to steam 20 to 30 miles offshore to find good fishing. As we were to find out in the coming week, all of the fish were to come no more than a mile from land and in water often as shallow as 25m.

Whilst cod, torsk, wolf fish fish and redfish were talked about, it was the flatties that really interested me. Hordes of dabs from the shore, 3kg plaice, lemon sole and that mother of all flats, the halibut, up to 20kg. I love catching flats no matter what type so this place seemed like heaven.

The day after our boat festival exploits saw Seán Ivory and myself down at the town pier to see what we could entice off the bottom. That desert island rig, the three-hook flapper was baited with some frozen mackerel and lobbed at around 30m onto a sand/mud bottom to see what might take an interest. I had just wound in the slack line when the tip started nodding – must have landed right on his nose I thought – and five minutes later a treble shot of near 30cm dabs were dancing at my feet. As it turned out over the next hour there were a lot of noses out there as each cast was instantly 'attacked' and three dabs appeared almost every retrieve. I'd never experienced such quality shore dab fishing. No need for rotten worm baits here, strips of sock would have been gobbled so plentiful where they. After a period I felt like I was in the ironic punishment scene out of the Simpson's as they just kept coming out. The onset of darkness did, however, see the whiting and codling out-competing them, but that's a story for another day.

Out on the boat, whilst they weren't so plentiful, the size was even better and we managed some fish not a million miles away from 2lb with lots around the 1½ lb mark. A full fillet of lance or a five or six-inch strip of coalfish – the standard bait here – were the baits that proved most effective. Big dabs are aggressive and weren't put off in the slightest by these relatively large baits. The big bonus was that they were the ideal size for the plaice that most of us were hankering for.

**"I'd never experienced such quality dab fishing."**

If Carlsberg did cliffs...!



## “What would Irish waters produce if we followed Faroese fisheries management practice?”



It was the lure of plaice like this...



...and these which drew Peter McGroary and his friends to the Faroes.

Plaice die of old age in the Faroes, Magni had told us and after looking at the pictures on his website [www.fishingwithblastein.com](http://www.fishingwithblastein.com) I'd no reason to doubt him. For our trip we managed two of the real bruisers, both of which fell to John Hedderman. The largest at nearly 6lb looked all the world like a halibut as we saw it coming up in the water. Nose to tail it measured 58 cm! The smaller of the two pleuronectes, a fish of 4½ lb, gobbled a strip of launce presented on standard flattie drifting gear of a three-hook down rig with beads and small revolving spoons. Interestingly, at this size they were very dark fish, almost like huge flounders, and whilst not quite as nice looking as our own plaice they were still stupendously sized flatties. Both fish were released and Magni, credit to him, is quite insistent that all these big plaice go back, with only smaller fish being kept.

They area we fished for the plaice would have

been relatively easily fished by trawlers or gill nets for that matter, and I explained to Magni that if this had been Ireland those plaice would have been hoovered up a long time ago. It was explained to us that no trawling is allowed inside 6 miles and as we were to see, the only commercial vessels in the inshore waters were small jiggers or longliners no larger than 10m. Minimal discards and very size selective methods of fishing and a healthy inshore fleet. What would our own waters be capable of producing if the same management was employed in these latitudes? It really was an example of what sensible fishery management can achieve.

No matter how hard the rest of us tried, no other plaice over 3lb were to appear, but each day a few smaller ones showed up. Still, if the plaice were being stubborn it was usually a simple job of unclipping the flowing trace and chucking on

a pirk and you'd be pumping a low double-figure cod in less than 20 minutes.

The landscape in which we fished was pretty amazing, trees were practically non-existent and sheer cliffs and bluffs abounded along what was an iron-bound coastline. The winds here tear and grab at the land each winter and have done so for aeons, so much so that trees or soil for that matter tend to be very sparse or non-existent. Many of the rivers we saw simply ran off the bare bedrock with no noticeable pools. The rock from which the landscape has been hammered gives you the impression that it's been around for millions of centuries and will be around for millions more to come. Put the Burren limestone up here and it wouldn't last two months!

Halibut were to evade us for the week we were there and that would be the only disappointment of the holiday. The 100lb-plus fish are caught

The rock gives the impression it's been around for millions of years.



Peter loves his flat fish.



Mike Hennessy took one of the 'smaller' plaice.



Kevin Barber with one of the fine dabs which were also numerous.

up here too, but the impression I got was that normally fish in the 15lb to 45lb bracket are relatively plentiful. On a couple of occasions small open boats longlining around us held up such fish for us to view. Okay, it's not too often I go fishing flats with whole coalfish, 250 gram pirks or giant shads, but when in Rome ... All three techniques were given air. To be truthful though, I would have been more chuffed with a big plaice and didn't really spend as much time as perhaps I should have, but some of the rest of the lads gave them a proper try, but aside from a fish around 40lb following up a hooked cod nobody was to see any sign. A shame really, as it would have capped things off nicely.

The quality of the charter service provided by Magni Blastein was excellent and to be honest better than what I've experienced at home. Flotation suits and boots were provided by the

boat as well as quality Penn and Shimano fishing rods and reels. We'd bazooka-cased our own gear, but I'd have been perfectly happy using the hired gear which is something I haven't been fit to say too often.

Each day onboard the boat we were fed like lords, with a full lunch including desert and coffee. It was like being onboard a floating restaurant! Credit must go to Magni's wife here as it was her home cooking and baking that fed seven hungry Irishmen each day. It was also a great break in the monotony of our cod diets. Each day we took plenty around the 8lb to 12lb mark and so naturally enough beautiful white fillets of chunky cod were put on the table each night.

The Faroe Islands might not be on the angling radar so to speak, but for the week we were there we managed plaice to 6lb, cod to 19lb, coalfish to 12lb, whiting to 4lb and sea trout to 6lb,

along with dabs, redfish, scorpion fish, rainbow trout, torsk, ling, slob trout and pollack. The shore potential is amazing, and aside from some fishing for sea trout is pretty well unexploited. Just messing around the little town itself we had great dab sport, plenty of whiting, coalies up to 3½ lb and cod to 3lb, not to mention some spectacular sea trout fishing. If we had access to a car I'm convinced we could have had even more sport.

Aside from the fishing, the Faroese people are a very friendly lot and were only too delighted to share their country and its fishing. They strike you as a very independent group of people and distinctly proud of their Norse heritage. With a separate currency and language, which I thought at times sounded ever so faintly Gaelic in tone, they regard themselves as very distinct from their Danish counterparts. Virtually everybody we met also spoke perfect English.



The biggest plaice of the trip comes to the net.



Shads are the main method for halibut and big cod.



Launce are the second choice for the Faroese plaice.

**“It's not often I go fishing with whole coalfish.”**

