

Skarvheimen 1999

By experience we always take our mountain hikes one of the first weeks in August. However, this year I had to participate in the annual assembly of the Swedish Naturist Federation at the conference centre Galaxen in Blekinge in the south of Sweden. So we decided to start directly after that. I left the conference centre Sunday (July 7) and drove the 600 km to Karlskoga where my pal Bengt lives. We used that evening to check and repack our rucksacks. Bengt had bought a new smaller and lighter rucksack and he had also invested in a new silk sleeping sheet bag (you do not have to bring any regular sleeping bag, only a bag of sheets to protect the bedclothes). We minimized the amount of food supplies and arrived at a total weight of 8 to 10 kilograms. Mine was the heavier, due his extremely thin and light silk bag according to Bengt.



Early next morning, we had breakfast, packed the car and were off. We had to be at our destination, Geiterygghytta, before the last beds were occupied so we hurried as best we could. The convention at these cabins operated by the Norwegian Tourist Club (they have some 365 of them) is that you are entitled to get a bed before the younger ones if you are 60 years or more. Geiterygghytta is cabins at 1224 meters above sea level with 78 beds of which about 40 are in two large dormitories with 4 beds in 5 compartments. It's a little primitive but very nice because everybody is doing their utmost to be nice and friendly and helpful. Geiterygghytta is a cabin with full service. That is, they serve meals and you can buy a beer and have a shower.

We ate the sandwiches that Bengt had made before we left home. We shared them with the some of the geese, rabbits and hens they kept as a local menagerie and watched the sunset over the surrounding mountains. Quite different than the lowlands of Sweden.



Tuesday morning we started on the first real part of the hike (the 3 km from where we had parked the car didn't really count). We had agreed to go from Geiterygghytta to Kongshelleren, a 4-hour walk. The indicated hours between cabins were set by people who walk pretty fast and take no rests. We assumed we would do in something between 5 and 6 hours, which we did. The weather wasn't too good but it did not rain. The temperature was pleasant but the

clouds were low and blocked the view from time to time.

We had ascended up in the clouds when we were getting closer to Kongshelleren and the fog was getting pretty thick at times. We didn't see the cabin until we were very close (20 meter). Kongshelleren is a self-service cabin, which means there are no personnel to help you. There are beds with bedclothes and there is provision for sale of various sorts. You pay for what you take or use and they rely on your honesty and it works very nice! These cabins are even more primitive but you have shelter and it is warm and dry and you do not have to be hungry either.

Kongshelleren consists of two log cabins, one main cabin with 8 beds and an annex with 4. We learned that 4 ladies occupied the annex and we were waiting to make their acquaintance. However, it lasted and they didn't turn up in the main cabin where we had our quarters. I had some business over in their cottage (which contained the firewood supplies and the lavatory) and invited them over. They accepted and we had a very cozy evening with Sofia and Anita amongst the sweaty clothes hanging under the roof to dry and with just a simple cup of coffee or chocolate. The ladies were Swedish and from Örebro and it turned out we had mutual friends at Volvo.



We found out that Sofia and Anita had plans to hike to the same place we were heading for the next day, Steinbergdalshytta. They thought we made that up there and then. Such suspicious minds!

Wednesday morning came with thick fog. We had breakfast and discovered we could not even distinguish the other cabin 20 m away. One of the guests had brought his fishing gear and was trying it out in the lake close to the cabin. To his astonishment he got 4 very big trout. We thought we were going to have some fresh fish for breakfast but he was going to carry them home. Probably very few people fish in these waters. It is high up, 1400 meters, and it is at least three or four hours to walk before you can start fishing.



We went over to the other cabin to see whether we would have any company on the next stretch or not. We found Sofia still in bed dizzy. She could not get out of bed without the world spinning. She said it usually passes away after a few hours. She wasn't in the mood for any company, so we left for our next target. We had

difficulties finding the next "T" on the marked trail due to the thick fog. As we descended the fog faded and it became a very pleasant trip.

Steinbergdalshytta is in the Aurlandsdalen valley at about 1050 meter above sea level. Steinbergdalshytta is a private cabin with some 50 beds and full service. It was built long before it was possible arrive by car and it has been enlarged in several steps. It is very private and cozy. We rented the sauna and had a nice bath before the 3-course dinner was served.

Our hikes are never very long. The idea is to enjoy the mountains and the special atmosphere induced by the people living above tree level and the people hiking in the mountains. It is a cultural thing. We are not out set any kind of records. However, we get sweaty anyhow. There are always a room where you can hang your wet or sweaty clothes to dry over night. There is also another important room in most of these cabins, the "peisestua", where there is a large open fireplace, comfortable chairs, something to read and a deck of cards if that is what you want to do. This is where the social life is at best. You will meet a lot of people if you are the least interested. Everybody is wide open for a dialogue. And we enjoyed it!



Sofia and Anita did not come at all that night. They didn't turn up for breakfast either. We wondered what had happened. There were no telephones so we could do very much about it.

Thursday turned out to be our best day at foot in the mountains. The sun was shining and the sky was high. We could see for miles and miles. Mountains behind mountains. And it was an easy walk from Steinbergdalshytta to Geiterygghytta. Bengt declared he never wanted to descend from the mountain. He'd like to stay. We found a nice ravine with small creek at the bottom and carpet of green herbs. We got rid of the rucksacks and lied down to rest in the sun. We were in no hurry since all we needed to do was to arrive at the cabin in due time for the dinner and a bed.

When we arrived we found out that most Norwegians had decided to meet there that day. All the nice rooms were taken and we were given quarters in the big dormitory. That's when we met Sofia and Anita again. They had spent the entire day at the cabin and the night too. And then they had walked right to Geiterygghytta. We had a nice dinner together and spent the evening talking about this and that.

The next day it was light rain and about 7 degrees centigrade. We decided to abandon our plan to take a day's walk to St.Pål and back. The clouds are too low. We had an alternate plan to walk back to car drive down the Aurlandsdalen valley to Aurland and then over to Flåm to take the train from sea level to almost 900 meter higher over a distance of about 20 km. We offered the ladies transport but they declined. So we split and they continued their hike to the next cabin where they had their car.

In the car we switched to other clothes and started our trip down the valley. The first three km or so was through a tunnel. Then we continued down the valley past Steinbergdalshytta and other similar places and then through another tunnel and another tunnel etc and then serpentine down the steep slopes at the end of the valley down to the Sognefjorden (the deepest and longest fjord of Norway). Spectacular, I can tell you! We went south along the fjord to Flåm and parked the car. We purchased tickets to the train which, to our astonishment, was a train from the subway of Stockholm. But it did the job without any problems. We ascended in a serpentine fashion up along the valley. The train actually did a 360 degree turn inside the mountain and came out much higher than where we entered the tunnel. This



amazing piece of engineering was started long before the World War 2 but it was finished during the war: ready 1940 and was equipped with electrical operation 1944. There are 20 tunnels on this short stretch. Flåm is a centre of communication in that end of the country. Several ferry lines have Flåm as their hub and the train we just experienced is corresponding with the train between Oslo and Bergen four to six times per day all year around. It is no tourist trap even if it looks that way.

After that we assumed that now we have had the thrill of the journey. How wrong! We had decided to return via Lærdal. The road started quite easy up along the slopes of the mountain but it soon became quite spectacular. We went on a very narrow, steep road along the mountainside with free view for hundreds of meters straight down to the ocean floor. The road went from zero to about 1350 meters in a few kilometres. We found out that the road over the mountain is going to be replaced by the longest road tunnel of the world next year: almost 25 km in one single hole!

From Lærdal we went to Borgund where the most famous of Norway's wooden churches is located. It is from about 1150 AD.

We continued to the lake Mjøsa where we visited some friends, had something to eat and had a trip in our friend's boat on the lake. We also met **S/S Skibladner** on the lake, the world's oldest steamboat driven by paddlewheels still in regular operation.

So, now you know why we were very satisfied with our hike 1999.

If you want to learn a little more about the places we visited, see the links below.

<http://www.fjordinfo.no/laerdal/html/informasjon.html>

<http://www.alr.no>

<http://www.dnt.org/> (in Norwegian only)