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Birka Banner

Birka Lodge, Vasa Order of America

May - June 2020

Birka Lodge Update

Greetings to all Birka Members. I hope since my last message, members are well during these times of quarantine. These are very unusual times for us all. I do hope everyone is healthy and enjoying a safe summer. Vasa Lodge meetings throughout the District and the nation are canceled as well as Midsommar Fests and other summer events, including our summer outing.

The **June 25th meeting is canceled**. The Fall newsletter with the September and October schedules will be mailed in early September. I will be discussing with our District Deputy and District Master when the **Installation of Officers** will be held and how we can meet responsibility once things open up a bit. More on that in the Fall newsletter.

Hopefully, in late summer the Activities Committee will meet to discuss plans going forward.

Best wishes and congratulations to all 2020 High School and College graduates and others celebrating special anniversaries and retirements this year.

Reminder: Sick Benefit Fund

If you have been a Vasa member for five years or more and have paid your dues, you are entitled to receive assistance with medical and dental expenses from the Grand Lodge. Each member is entitled to receive up to \$3,000. If you would like an application, please contact Secretary Judy Tanzer.

Please notify the Assistant Recording Secretary Marlys Mahajan by phone (978-468-4423) of any address changes. Thank you.

Annual dues of \$25 for 2020 are due. If you have not paid your dues, please mail your dues to Financial Secretary Linda Boylan, 12 Upton Lane, Boxford, MA 01921. Make your check payable to: **Birka Lodge No. 732.**

In closing, your presence is requested at our next meeting to give encouragement to your officers and make more secure the future of our Order.

Until we can meet again in person, enjoy the summer and stay healthy. Keep in touch.

In truth and unity,

Linda Christianson,
PDM, Chairman



Impress your friends and family with these unique, quirky facts about Norway's close neighbors, Sweden.



For many outside the region, Norway and Sweden are one and the same. While the two Scandinavian countries do share a lot of history, culture, and closely related languages, there are also some key differences.

Today we look at some of the quirks that make Norway's sibling unique. Here's some of our favorite Sweden facts.

1) Sweden imports waste – from Norway!

The Swedish people love to recycle. Only 1% of waste ends up in landfill with 50% being recycled or composted and 49% being incinerated for energy. This may sound like great news but it has caused one big problem: there's not enough waste left to keep the incinerators running.

So, Sweden has come up with a novel solution. They import waste from Norway and the UK to keep the lights on. And as a double bonus, the countries actually pay Sweden to take their waste away!



2) There's a hotel made of ice

Sweden is home to the famous Ice Hotel in the village of Jukkasjärvi. The hotel is crafted each year from two-tonne blocks of ice from the nearby Torne River.

Starting from scratch, the hotel starts to take place as soon as the cold season arrives in the Arctic. Builders and artists alike work to create a hotel that's unique every time.

And if you ever think health and safety regulations go too far sometimes, spare a thought for the owners of the Ice Hotel. Despite being made entirely of frozen water, the gigantic igloo is still required to have fire alarms fitted!

3) The duck beats the mouse



In most of the world, Mickey Mouse reigns supreme as Disney's best loved character. But in Sweden, Donald Duck is WAY more popular.

Some put this down to Donald's rather flawed character being more relatable to Europeans than Mickey's virtuous perfection. Whatever the reason, Donald is by far Sweden's favorite Disney character.

Every Christmas Eve since 1959, at 3pm, the nation sits together to watch *Kalle Anka och hans vänner önskar god Jul*. That's *Donald Duck and his friends wish you a Merry Christmas*, for the non-Swedes among you!

Donald is so popular that in 2006 the country had to change the law to forbid voting for non-existent candidates as protest voters would typically write in 'Donald Duck'!

4) A Swedish drink outsells Coca-Cola

A surprising brand that takes a backseat in Sweden is Coca-Cola, at least during the Christmas period. While many nations enjoy traditional festive drinks, such as Egg Nog or Mulled Wine, Sweden's yuletide drink of choice is a carbonated beverage, or soda, called Julmust.

Julmust is a fermented, though alcohol-free, malt drink similar to root beer. 45 million liters are consumed in December when it outsells Coca-Cola and, in fact, every other soft drink brand combined.

Julmust then disappears from shelves for a few months when it reappears at Easter as Påskmust – the same drink in a different bottle! 75% of 'must' is drunk in December and the remaining 25% whenever Easter falls. Outside of these times the drink is almost impossible to obtain.

5) North Korea owes 45-year-old Volvo debt

After the Korean War, North Korea attempted to rebrand itself as paradise and started some grand engineering projects using machinery bought from the West. Sweden was one of the first countries to jump aboard the hype train and open up financial relations. The people of paradise needed opulent vehicles to drive around in and so in the 1970s ordered 1000 Volvo 144GL luxury cars from Sweden.

The first of these were delivered in 1974. Shortly afterwards, it became clear that North Korea neither could, nor wanted to, pay for these vehicles. Instead, it was simply letting the bills pile up and, to this day the debt remains.

In typical Swedish fashion, realizing there was little they could actually do, they simply kept sending invoices. And so, every year, the Swedish government recalculates the debt and sends a new invoice. The debt stands at around €300m and while the country knows there's little chance of seeing the money, they're making sure it never gets forgotten!

6) Sweden had a pirate King!

Scandinavia's political history can make fascinating reading, especially the machinations of the [Kalmar Union](#) era, but one King stands out as being more bizarre than most. Eric of Pomerania became Eric XIII of Sweden on the death of his Grandaunt, Margaret I.

Eric wasn't the best King. He inherited a war that Margaret had been winning and proceeded to lose it spectacularly, losing large parts of his Kingdom. He also managed to annoy the nobles in Sweden, Norway and Denmark – scholars will tell you that's rarely a good idea.

When the Danish nobility refused to ratify his choice of successor, he fled to Gotland and took over Visborg Castle as a kind of Royal strike! But things get weirder still when, after being fully deposed, he started a career – successful by all accounts – as a pirate in the Baltic Sea, taking revenge on the Hanseatic merchants who had caused much trouble during his reign. Then, after ten years of piracy, he returned to high society as Duke of Pomerania!

7) Yes, Fika is really a thing



Everyone loves to take a break from work when they can but in Sweden, the idea is baked into the culture. The practice is called Fika and it's a recognized break twice daily where workers enjoy coffee, cake and chat.

All workers take breaks though, right? Well...ignoring the fact that in the Western world many work breaks are only theoretical, Fika is a communal and pretty much compulsory thing. So much so that in most companies anyone not taking part is considered rude. Maybe that's why Swedish employees are the fourth happiest in the world!

8) Swedes love quirky marketing

The Swedish Tourist Association loves finding new ways to market the country to people from other countries. Two of the most popular and interesting have been @Sweden and the Call a Swede phone line.

@Sweden was an initiative on Twitter where each week a new citizen would take over the account and tweet things that interested them about their country, life and work. Tweeters would also interact with the public and answer questions about the country as they saw it. The initiative ran for 7 years and more than 350 Swedish citizens had the chance to represent their country to the world.

The Call a Swede phonenumber was introduced to celebrate 250 years since censorship was abolished. The idea was that there would be a single telephone number that anyone around the world could call and talk to a Swedish person picked at random from a group of volunteers. The scheme ran for 3 months and fielded calls from all around the world.

9) The Swedes invented nicotine replacement gum

If you or anyone you know has ever given up smoking with nicotine gum, you can give thanks to Sweden. The first product – Nicorette – was developed by Leo AB in Helsingborg. It followed the observation that smoking Swedish submariners would switch from tobacco to chewing tobacco or snus to receive their nicotine fix when on duty.

Nicorette wasn't the first time anyone put nicotine in chewing gum but what they did do was develop a polymer that controlled the release of nicotine into the bloodstream making it possible to control levels allowing for a sustained release and a steady withdrawal, helping millions of people quit for good.

10) Making light of dark days

It can be tough living in the North of Sweden in winter when there's less than 5 hours of daylight for months on end. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that arises in response to a lack of daylight and affect many people in the far North of Europe.

To help combat this, one city in Sweden installed lightboxes in bus stops to allow people waiting for their transport to experience a little extra daylight during the dark days of winter.

11) Scaling the Solar System

Sweden might not be the first place on your mind when thinking of space exploration, but it does lead the world in one key astronomical way – it has the world's largest scale model of the solar system.

Emanating from the Ericsson Dome – the world's largest hemispherical building – in Stockholm, the model reaches 950km away in Kiruna where the concept of Termination Shock – the end of the solar system – is marked.

The scale is 1:20million and each object is marked with a model or statue. Mercury is a mere 3km from the center while Earth is 7.6km away, Neptune is 229km away and Pluto is 300km away.



THE MYTHOLOGY OF NORWEGIAN TROLLS



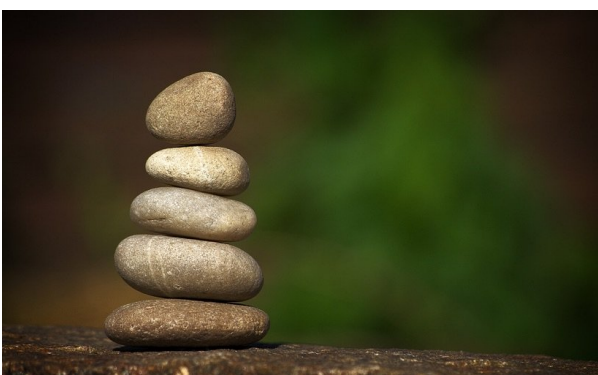
You may have driven Trollstigen or hiked to the Troll's Tongue, but how much do you know about the mythology?

Whether it's a tacky figurine lined up on a gift shop shelf ready to give you that 'perfect' souvenir, or a fluorescent haired cartoon toy aimed at entertaining children, we all know trolls. Or do we?

Trolls are one of the mythical creatures that are portrayed in popular culture on a regular basis.

We've seen them helping Queen Elsa in Frozen, trying to cook Hobbits in the Lord of the Rings and guarding bridges to the annoyance of our fairy-tale heroes. Each portrayal is slightly different from the last.

So where do our mythical trolls come from? And what are 'proper' trolls like? Well, the answer to that, as always, is complicated! Join us as we go into the Hall of the Mountain King and try to get to the bottom of the legends



The origins of the mythology

As [Norse mythology](#) was mostly handed down orally, it can be difficult to get a real handle on what's what.

Gods and monsters are referred to by different names and when we come to interpret the source material – the Poetic Edda and Prose Edda that were the best attempts at writing everything down – we find various scholars disagreeing on almost everything!

The noun troll or troll, meaning variously fiend, demon, werewolf and giant, comes from a proto-Germanic word trullan or unknown origin.

There's much overlap in the terms jötunn (giant), troll, þurs (hostile monsters) and risi (heroic beings). Some theorize that they're four distinct classes of beings while others believe that troll is a catch-all for 'mischievous creatures'.

What we do get a kind of agreement on, when we distil all of the arguments down, is that there are two types of troll.



Trolls of the mountain and of the forest

The first type is known as the forest or mountain troll. They're generally depicted as large, dumb, brutish creatures akin to a large Neanderthal. These are the beings that eat hobbits for dinner in Lord of the Rings or distract from Voldemort in Harry Potter.



They are said to use their connections with nature to uproot trees to use as clubs as well as being able to cause hurricanes and avalanches.

These are also the trolls whose riddles you have to solve to cross a bridge, if you ever find yourself inside a fairytale, or playing an RPG!

Trolls of the caves

Unlike their forest-dwelling cousins, cave trolls live completely underground and are generally depicted as smaller

than humans with a large round abdomen and short stubby arms and legs. These are more akin to the trolls that help Queen Elsa in Frozen.

In Norse mythology, however, they're not generally friendly to humans. They use their connections with nature to baffle and deceive humans.

No matter the type of troll, they all have some characteristics in common. Aside from being unfriendly, they're also generally depicted as stupid and dangerous. They may set clever riddles but they're usually easy enough for humans to overcome.

Getting the better of trolls



One tale tells of Askeladden, the youngest son of a farmer who needed wood from the forest to pay off his debts. When his first two sons went into the forest and returned empty handed – having been scared away by the troll – Askeladden went into the forest with a piece of cheese to keep him from starving.

When he encountered the angry troll, Askeladden pulled out the piece of cheese and, pretending it was a rock, squeezed it until the whey came out.

Thus, the troll was fooled and, fearing his great strength, offered to help the boy with his wood cutting.

After working hard, the troll invited the boy back to his home for a meal. As he was tending the fire, he pointed to two huge buckets and asked the boy to fetch water.

The boy realized that he couldn't carry such massive buckets, let alone filled with water, so he claimed they were too small and that he would simply bring the whole spring instead.

The troll obviously didn't want a whole spring in his house and so they exchanged chores. The boy tended the fire while the troll went to get water to make porridge. Once it was ready the boy suggested they have an eating contest.

They ate as much as they could, however the boy had placed his knapsack under his shirt and was filling it with the porridge, without the troll noticing. Once it was full he slashed a hole in it and continued to eat.

Once the troll was full and could eat no more, the boy suggested that the troll cut a hole in his stomach, like they boy appeared to have done, so that he could eat as much as he liked. The troll, being rather stupid, did so and promptly died. Thus, the boy took all of his gold and silver and the farmer could pay off his debts.

Other ways of driving out trolls



If you can't get the better of a troll in an eating contest, then the best way is to ring church bells. As un-Christian beings, trolls are said to go crazy when they hear the bells and run far away.

Trolls are also repelled by lightning, which kills them – likely a result of their run-ins with Thor who is said to have hunted trolls across the land.

Trollstigen

Some legends attest that trolls turn to stone when exposed to sunlight and that this is the source of the huge stony crags in places such as Trolld-Tindterne (Troll Peaks) in Norway.

In fact, there are many places within Norway named after the creatures, from the Trollstigen mountain pass to the famous Trolltunga (Troll's Tongue) rock formation.

No matter what type of troll you encounter, you now know that all you need to do is keep your wits about you, keep a knapsack full of cheese, and hope there's some church bells around!

Scandinavian Runestones: Viking History in Plain Sight

Posted by

[David Nickel](#) — May 15, 2020 in [Scandinavia 0 4](#)



Discover the most impressive runestones from the Viking Age and even earlier. This historic form of writing can be seen all across Scandinavia to this day.

The recent [discovery of several Viking ship graves](#) in Norway has lifted interest in [Viking history](#) to new heights. While there's no doubting the fascinating discoveries being made, some truly remarkable Viking artifacts exist in plain sight throughout Scandinavia: runestones.

Standing stones of Scandinavia

The region's tradition of carving inscriptions into raised stones as a memorial began as early as the 4th century. But the vast majority of runestones still standing date from the 9th and 10th centuries. That's around the [later years of the Viking Age](#), when there were many tales to tell!

Scholars have attempted to translate many of the runic inscriptions, with varying degrees of success. There was not one runic alphabet. Far from it. Language evolved much more so than today, and would have varied substantially between communities.

Now, let's take a look at some of the most famous examples of this [unique viking artwork](#) still standing all around Scandinavia. We start with one of the most famous, in Sweden.

Södermanland, Sweden

While Denmark and Norway have just a handful of runestones between them, Sweden has many more. West of Swedish capital [Stockholm](#), the Södermanland region alone is home to 450 recorded runic inscriptions.

Perhaps the most famous is the Stenkvista runestone near Stenkvita church. It is one of several runestones that reference Thor, but this one has a depiction of Thor's hammer, Mjölhnir.

Another famous stone at Skåang is notable for two sets of inscriptions. The first is written with the oldest known runic alphabet and is believed to date to the 6th century. A second inscription was added during the Viking Age.

Elsewhere in the region, a runestone with tales of extensive warfare throughout western Europe stands more than three meters high in the large burial ground at Kungshället in Kjula.

Strängnäs, Sweden

Rök, Sweden



The runestone of Rök, [Sweden](#), is one of the most popular attractions on Scandinavia's burgeoning Viking tourist trail. Yet its origin story continues to mystify.

First-time visitors to the runestone outside Rök in a rural part of East Middle Sweden are often left speechless. The imposing five-ton carved stone has an almost alien-like appearance and is unlike any other archaeological find in the world.

Believed to date back to the early 9th century, the stone was raised and carved by a Viking struggling to cope with the death of his son. He channelled his emotions into carving this sprawling text, which consists of more than 700 runes spread across the stone's five sides.

While several translations have been made, experts struggle to interpret the results. [One recent study](#) even claims part of the inscription tells of the community's fears about a period of extended cold.

A team led by Per Holmberg, a professor of Swedish language at the University of Gothenburg, said that a series of 6th century volcanic eruptions plunged Sweden into a prolonged cold snap, killing as much as half the population.

Read more: [The Vikings in Norway](#)

The new study claims that the runestone's author could have been spooked by a series of events that occurred between the years 775 and 810. During that time, a solar storm, a very cold summer, and a near-total solar eclipse all took place, any of which could have been mistaken as an indicator of another extreme cold spell on its way.

The previous volcanic winter may have caused widespread fears of Ragnarök. In Norse mythology, that's essentially the end of the world. Researchers believe it's possible that the memory of those events may have been passed along through generations on the Rök runestone.

Jelling, Denmark



The [Jelling area](#) of [Denmark](#) is synonymous with Viking history. The town's 11th century stone church was built on the site of Harald Bluetooth's wooden church from the 900s.

Two giant burial mounds provide the backdrop for these runestones, considered to be some of the most famous historical artifacts in Denmark as they contain the oldest written references to the country's name.

Jelling runestone in Denmark

The Jelling stones make up part of a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) and as such have become one of Denmark's most popular sights. The bigger stone was raised by Harald Bluetooth to honour his parents and celebrate his conquest of Denmark. The smaller, older stone is said to have been raised by King Gorm the Old in memory of his wife, Thyra.

Rakkestad, Norway



As with Viking burial ships, runestones are still being discovered to this day across Scandinavia. Very few have been found in Norway, yet in 2018 this remarkable find was made in Rakkestad. That's only a handful of miles away from the location of the [Gjellestad ship](#).

However, unlike the burial ship and almost all the other runestones in Scandinavia, this one has been found to predate the Viking Age by as long as 400 years.

Read more: [Viking Clothing](#)

So old is the *Proto Norse* language of the 35 runes that it took researchers at the University of Oslo to confirm that they were indeed original runes. At the time of its discovery, runologist Karoline Kjesrud from the University of Oslo said only some of the stone can be translated.

“The first part of the inscription says *Lu irilaR raskaR runoR*, translating to ‘*Carve runes skilled runemaster*’. It is the first time in history that the word *raskar* (skilled) appears – a word now lost in the Norwegian language. The runestone thus becomes a valuable source of the history of the language. Currently, we do not know what is on the bottom side of the stone, besides that there are indeed runes.”

Ringerike style

The unusual [Ringerike style](#) of inscription, also known as Pr1, is when the runic bands end in heads of serpents or beasts.



It emerged from the Mammen style found during the end of the Viking Age. Named after a series of richly-carved stones in Norway's Ringerike district, the style sees thinner animals, almond-shaped eyes instead of round, and thinner, longer tendrils when compared to the Mammen style.

One example is this runestone in the grounds of Strängnäs Cathedral, also in Södermanland. It is one of seven such stones found at the church, of which five are walled and two have been placed outside. Another good example is the grave-slab found in the churchyard of St Paul's Cathedral, London.