

Sweden-Norway: about 5 weeks: Late July- Mid August 2012

Major Update: 18 April & Minor Addition at End 25 April 2012

In an earlier newsletter, I mentioned that I'd been thinking about a northern summer trip to Scandinavia for years and that Swedish friends keep inviting me over to do some walking in northern Sweden. They have done some more walking and have given me their latest information. My friends are in their 60s so this is not a super-strenuous trip, but they are fit and their suggested itinerary includes carrying everything and camping out. We will travel through some of the wildest country left in Europe.

You have the choice of starting in Göteborg (Gothenburg in English) with my friends and taking a night train north or flying direct (probably cheaper) to Luleå and meeting the group there. The night train from Göteborg up to the mountains is really a good start of the trip. You will get a view of the Swedish landscape, and also get a feel for the distances.

In mid April, the price per person from Göteborg to Murjek, in a 6-piece "liggvagn" (You make 6 beds at night) is about 900 SEK per person (A\$130). If we instead would like to have a 3-bed sleepingcoupe it would cost about 1200 (A\$170) each.

These prices are based upon "nonreturnable" tickets (if you don't use the place you get no money back. You can book fully returnable but then, for the liggvagn the price is about 1500 SEK (A\$215).



View towards Sulitelma mountains on the border between Sweden & Norway.

The trains go every day from Göteborg at 16.50 in the afternoon. With bus transfer from Murjek to Kvikkjokk we will be there at about 16.30. Normally we should be able to have a helicopter flight that same night, or if too late in the evening we will have to stay overnight in Kvikkjokk and then fly the next morning, which will not change the time schedule. There is another helicopter company flying from the north side of the walking area, and I think they could make the transport the same evening (in that case we continue by train an extra hour to Gällivaare, and then take another bus northwest into the mountains to Vietas, and fly from there. My Swedish friends have travelled with them several times on the northern side of Sarek, in and out). Normally the small helicopter takes 400 kgs, which is equivalent to 4 people with luggage. There should also be a possibility to send some extra food to the resupply point.



View from a lake close to Norway (the mountains in the picture are in Norway).

The two photos above were taken on my friends' trip to Sarek this past summer. In the Sarek area there are no huts. Only some reindeer watchers' (Lapps') huts, and a few bridges over very big creeks. The other creeks you will have to wade over. We propose to continue into Norway and go south to the wildest parts of Norway, Jotunheimen.

The track we will be following continues south (left in the picture) of the lake and goes straight "through" the mountains in the distance.

Now for some specifics. In the outline below, please remember that the weather can force us to change our plans. Safety has to come first. The descriptions have been provided by my Swedish friends.

The first walk is the longest of the trip – 9 days, 8 nights.

Day 1 is relatively easy. We take a helicopter in the afternoon and walk about 4 km to our first camp site.

Day 2. We are mainly in a mountain birch landscape with lush vegetation. We will have to wade across some creeks, cold water but normally not a problem. Our 2nd campsite is at the beginning of a long, almost horizontal part of the valley. In clear weather we have very spectacular views with high mountains around.



Somewhere on the walk.

Day 3. We go along the river and climb up camping where the last of the trees are. Good views. My friends say that they have usually seen moose wading and eating in the ponds along the river.

Day 4 begins with a hard walk up to a pass. From here it is possible to ascend the mountain Låddebakte with a magnificent view back down the valley. (We would only do this in fine weather.) If so, we camp relatively close to the climb. If not, we continue down the valley.

Day 5. We continue down the valley to our next camp from where we can do a 2-3 hour walk up to the Mihkájieghna Glacier.

Days 6-8. We follow river valleys (mostly), heading mainly west. Our exact camp sites will depend on how fast we are travelling.

Day 9. We walk to Staloluokta, an old Lappish summercamp on the edge of a huge lake. (These days, the Lapps do what we do at the start and fly in and out by helicopter.) There is a shop and we should be able to send some things in with the helicopter. As we continue straight into our 2nd walk.

The 2nd walk is four days, finishing in the Norwegian town of Sulitelma.

The Lofoten archipelago. We didn't have this in the original itinerary, but it sounds too good to miss. From Sulitelma, you go by bus via Fauske to Bodö and then ferry to one of the small fishing villages out there. (My friends camped at Moskenäs, and have also camped many years ago far out at Å). They were there 4 years ago around midsummer, and saw the midnight sun every night, but were extremely lucky with the weather. In early August, the sun sets at night, although it is still almost daylight at midnight (which it will be during the whole tour in the north). It is both possible to camp, and should also be possible to stay at smaller lodges. We will check this out as we continue the planning.

The bus timetables from Sulitelma to Lofoten are not official yet. But there should be busses and ferrys which can take us out in the Lofoten area in one day. Then perhaps 2 days out there would be ok. Next day back to Bodö/Fauske and then the night train down to Otta. My friends found a train leaving Fauske at 21.53 arriving Otta at 11.33 the next day. From Otta into Jotunheimen is a bus at 15.10 which will be in Böövertun at 17.10 (the bus continues westwards via Krossbu-Turtagröö to the fiords).

Jotunheimen. the Jotunheimen mountains, the highest in Scandinavia. We plan to do a walk of 4-5 days, staying in mountain lodges, beginning at Krossbu (75 beds). The intinery here is one of many possibilities. It should be possible to store spare gear somewhere at the start and collect it again at the end.

From Krossbu we walk to Skogadalsbøen (2 beds). The walk is supposed to take about five hours. The next day would be a six hour walk to Olavsbu (40 beds), then north four hours to Leirvassbu (200 beds), then northeast to Spiterstulen (140 beds). From here, weather permitting, it is possible to do a guided walk to Scandinavia's highest peak.

From Spiterstulen we should be able to catch a bus south. In the lodges mentioned above, you have the choice of buying or cooking your meals.

At the end of the walk, we head back toward Sweden via Oslo. We have the choice of train and/or bus. Just across the border, we get to Tanumshede where we turn off the main route and head toward the coastal town of Grebbestad where we collect the kayaks.

Sea Kayaking the Archipelago. My friends have done this almost every year for many years and have a number of alternatives depending on weather conditions. This should be a great way to finish. The three photos below are from one of their trips.



I could not find a connection all the way to Sweden, so I think we will have to stay overnight somewhere in Norway. If we stop overnight in Oslo, we can take a bus early next morning to Grebbestad (we stop in Tanum Rasta, and my friends will pick us up there for a 10 km drive to Grebbestad). According to the actual timetable this bus goes every day at 7.10 and will be in Tanum at 9.05. The buscompany could not say anything about the summer timetable, but there must be some bus (there are other companies as well) that goes about the same time. That would give us a good possibility to hire the kayaks and leave for 4 days out in the archipelago.

Depending on the weather conditions we can go inside the islands, or, if there is no wind, we can go to the outer islands. The kayaks are very stable, new Zealand Sea Bear Packhorse. Even in relatively hard wind my friends have never been close to overturning.

If weather is fine it will be a very nice experience. At this time of the year, just after the vacations, there is plenty of space in the archipelago. A 4-daytrip with 3 overnights would give us a good chance to see quite a lot.

If, however, the weather should be too rough (doesn't happen often at this time of year, but it is possible), we will have to skip the kayak tour. In this case, we can finish with walks in the forest, staying in three sided shelters which give substantial protection from the weather.

What do you need to bring?

By going toward the end of July, there should be fewer mosquitos and it is still totally light in the middle of the night. Fewer mossies doesn't mean no mossies, so repellent is a good idea. You can probably get away without a torch in the early part of the trip, but might need one at the end.

In some areas, we can find firewood, but we will definitely need stoves some of the time. You will need to carry your share of the evening meals and food. As on all our trips, you will need to provide your own breakfasts and lunches.

The temperature can be between 0°C and 25°C or even more. Normally it is 8°-18° C. It can rain a lot, but my friends have very seldom had long periods of rain. (Past experience is no guarantee.) You need good raincoats/goretex clothes and also good tents. My friends have experienced very strong winds on 2-3 occasions. You need to be prepared.

Footwear. The ground is varied. Some is hard but there are also relatively long parts with wet grasslands. Some people walk with high, impregnated leatherboots, but others normally walk with gum-boots. Many walk with leather-boots with goretex membranes. You have to count on getting wet, so carry some extra socks. We recommend light runners to have on in the evening. Some people bring something to wear when wading in cold water, to protect the feet from stones etc. If my friends don't make it with their gum-boots, they sometimes have to use their runners. Some of the wades are relatively short, on sandy bottoms where barefoot will do.

Is it for you?

This trip is not for the average tourist. You need to be prepared to accept whatever the weather may throw at us. As with all our trips, you need to be more self-reliant than on most other tours. My Swedish friends who have put together this itinerary are bushwalkers, not professional guides. They are coming along on parts of the trip because they enjoy it. They are happy to share their experience, but don't expect them to be tour guides.

The Walkabouts guide (Russell Willis unless he breaks a leg) has never been to this area before. He has, however, led walks in similar climates in Patagonia and the Canadian arctic.

If you can't be flexible enough to accept whatever changes we may have to make, this trip is not for you. If you can accept that, it should be a wonderful experience you'll remember for the rest of your life.

Cost

Cost. \$1495 per person.

If you can't do the full trip, it should be possible to leave part way along the journey. At this point, we can't offer a discount for that.

Our fee covers **only** the services of the Walkabouts guide, evening meals on walks where we can't purchase them, and all the pre-trip organisation. It does not include other meals, accommodation or transport. The Walkabouts guide will share these expenses with the rest of the group on an equal basis.

Sweden isn't cheap. Norway is even more expensive. Using a helicopter at the start has got to cost a substantial amount. We will keep costs as low as we can reasonably do, but they will almost certainly be some thousands of dollars. We will have a better idea of exactly what things will cost closer to departure – we cannot possibly say what exchange rates will look like by then.

My Swedish friends have offered to book all the trains for us. We will need to pay in advance.

You will need your own travel insurance. We cannot take anyone who does not have travel insurance.

The fee above does not cover our public liability insurance. Public liability insurance for our overseas trips has been a problem in recent times. Our overseas trips were removed from our main policy and then insured individually. The cost for covering the last single trip we did like this \$1925. The actual cost above will depend on the final price we are quoted this year.

If we did not have public liability insurance and you were to make a claim on your travel insurance, it would be possible for your travel insurance provider to sue Walkabouts owner Russell Willis. That's the way the law works in Australia. It's not a chance we can afford to take. When we get a quote, we will split the cost equally among all the participants.

Conditions

- 1 A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if we are forced to cancel. The trip will run with as few as two. We already had two bookings at the time these notes were updated.
- 2 Payment in full is due as soon as the trip is confirmed or when you book, whichever is later. Cancellation fees are \$900 before 1 May and the full \$1495 after that.
- 3 All participants are responsible for obtaining the necessary passport and visas and must have some form of travel insurance.

April Update

We are currently looking to leave Gothenburg sometime between 21 and 23 July and finish sometime before the end of August.

As of mid April, return airfares from major Australian cities were available for between \$1800 and \$3000. We would appreciate it if anyone who can find a better deal would let us know. The flights I have found so far have a number of stops. Many take the better part of two days. At this point, I haven't found anything less than 24 hours each way.

Our normal minimum number for a trip like this is five. I (Russell Willis) want to do it so I will drop the number to two. As of 18 April, I had two confirmed.

Questions?

Try as I might, I've almost certainly forgotten some useful piece of information. The more and the sooner you ask your questions, the more likely it is that we can give you the best possible trip.

Draft day by day itinerary

Day 0 - acclimatisation day, begin to recover from Jetlag. You must arrive in Gothenburg – or at least that time zone – at least one full day before we take the night train.

Day 1 -- train

Day 2 - continue travel and helicopter to Sarek

Day 3-10 - walk to resupply point.

Day 11-14 - finish the walk to Sulitelma

Day 15 - to Lofoten

Day 16-17 - in the Lofoten Archipelago

Day 18-19 - Back to Bodö/Fauske, night train to Otta, bus to Jotunheimen

Day 20-24 walking in the mountains

Day 25 - leave the mountains and start toward Sweden. Overnight en route.

Day 26 - finish travel to Grebbestad, start the kayak trip

Day 27-28 - sea kayaking

Day 29 - finish kayak trip and return to Goteborg. Trip ends.

Day 30 - spare. Do not book any further travel before day 31. This allows for weather delays, etc. If we decide to spend an extra day in Oslo, don't book before day 32.

Footwear Update

Here are a two photos of the kind of boots my Swedish friends wear for hiking in Sarek.



The gumboots cost appr. 100 AUD.

Note the height. While many Swedes now wear leather boots with Goretex, these will fill up in shallower water than the heavy gumboots shown in the photos.

Bring your normal boots, but if you think you might want to walk in the kind of boots shown in the photos, try and arrive early enough so you can buy them.

My friends advise that in Norway it is probably better with leather boots, because it is drier.

Final note. We need to fix the start date and book the train for those doing the overnight train ride as soon as possible.