

Tjurholmen in the river Göta älv Viking ships then and now Viking Age farmstead

Discovered: A Viking ship!

This stone stands close to the river Göta älv and is difficult to see from the path. The Viking ship *Äskekärr I* was discovered here in 1933. It is now on display in Gothenburg Museum. Vidfamne is a working replica of the ship. Photograph: Pelle Dalberg.



Tjurholmen viewed from Ranneberget south of Älvängen

Tjurholmen is the second largest island in the river Göta älv (Hisingen being the largest). It is located in the parish of Romelanda and in the municipal district of Kungälv. It is one of the largest agricultural properties in the province of Bohuslän. The southern part of the island is a protected area for wildlife.

On 17 March 1303, the Norwegian King Håkon Magnusson and the Swedish King Birger Magnusson, son of King Magnus III of Sweden, met on Tjurholmen to negotiate a treaty to establish the border between their kingdoms. This was not the first time that chiefs and kings had gathered at Tjurholmen. The island is thought to have been the site chosen for the meetings of many great men.

When Bohuslän was handed over to Sweden with the signing of the Treaty of Roskilde in 1658

and the Bohuslän regiment was installed at Backamo, west of Lilla Edet, Tjurholmen became the colonel's residence for several years. The island was in the possession of Field Marshal Rutger von Ascheberg for a while.

The bridge that can be seen spanning the river to the left of the rocky outcrop is Sweden's longest private bridge.

There is a story about how it was decided whether Tjurholmen would belong to Sweden or Norway. A watertight barrel was dropped into the river upstream from Tjurholmen. If it floated past the west side of the island, Sweden would have Tjurholmen. But the barrel floated down river on the east side, so the island became Norwegian. Believe it or not.



Vidfamne – the Viking ship

Vidfamne is a full-scale replica of Äskekärr I, the ship that was discovered in the mud banks of the river at Äskekärr. It was launched in 1994. The replica is built of oak, with a spruce mast and six pairs of oars. It has an 88-square-meter sail. The total weight of the ship is about 17 tonnes. During

In 1064, the Norwegian king Harald Hårdråda ("hard ruler") sailed 60 ships up the river to Lake Vänern. There must have been at least four places where he had to pull the ships over land. Two years later, Harald was killed in the Battle of Stamford Bridge near York. His conqueror, Harold Godwinson, was killed 19 days later at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and William the Conqueror became King of England. This traditionally symbolises the end of the Viking Age, although Viking campaigns continued in the following decades.

In 1933, a Viking ship was lifted from the clay banks of the river Göta älv, about 50 metres from the edge of today's river. Äskekärr I was built in about 935, measured 16 metres in length and was a type of merchant ship known as a "knarr". It had been repaired with a piece of wood from southern regions, suggesting it had sailed on the continent.

It was found close to the village of Äskekärr and, to date, it is the only site in Sweden where Viking ships have been found. Äskekärr II was discovered in 1993, is 14 metres long and dates back to about 1073. Äskekärr II has not yet been lifted out of its clay bed in which it has been preserved.

The knarr was a wide-hulled cargo ship with a few pairs of oars. It was primarily used for navigation in harbours and in calm waters.

the summer months, Vidfamne is moored next to the restaurant "Sjömagasinet" in Gothenburg and during the winter months she is on Ringön. Vidfamne is owned by Sällskapet Vikingatida Skepp (Viking Age Ship Society). Photograph: Carlo Jakobsson.

The warships were narrower and faster. They could be up to 30 metres long with 130 square metres of sail and 50 pairs of oars. To unprotected towns on the coasts, a warship like this was a terrible war machine.

The cog progressively replaced the Viking Age knarr during the Middle Ages. As a ship, it is associated with Lübeck and the Hanseatic League. It was a skeleton-built, deep-water ship, whose rig enabled it to sail closer to the wind without relying on oars or the effort of rowers. It was built with a stern castle for defence against pirates. Cogs could carry more goods than the earlier, Nordic type of ship.

Their stability meant that they could take far greater risks in rough seas than northerners could in their lighter, clinker-built vessels, which had to wait for calmer weather before continuing their journeys (Weibull).

Cogs were flat-bottomed and took advantage of the tides. Before there were harbours with quays for mooring, the cog would be sailed on to a long, shallow beach at high tide. When the tide went out, the boat would be high and dry and could be unloaded and loaded. When the tide came in again, it was ready to set sail.



Viking Age Farmstead in Ale

The farmstead is located in a grove of deciduous trees (seen here behind the building) overlooking the river Göta älv, not far from Äskekärr where the Viking Age ships were

found. It has plenty of space for staging different events, games, activities, handicrafts and excursions.



Viking Age toilet

The modern toilet is totally disguised from the outside. The building has been constructed using the post-and-plank method. Vertical posts with carved grooves in which planks are horizontally stacked.

It was a method of using all the timber without wasting any of it. Short pieces of plank were gathered together to form a section of wall. The distance between the vertical posts varied according to the length of the planks.



Here it is!

In the Viking Age, there was no written language other than the runes, which can be fairly difficult to read. That's why they have put this sign up, to help visitors find what they're looking for!



Chieftain's farmstead

When completed, the Viking Age Farmstead in Ale will be an authentic reconstruction of a Viking chieftain's dwelling. The plan is to reconstruct several buildings, surrounded by a wooden palisade.

The farmstead will also be home to animals and crops that would have been typical during the Viking Age. The entire farmstead is modelled on a 10th-century site found on Tissø in Denmark.

Text and photography: Bo Björklund.