

Göta Canal

CYCLING AND HIKING ALONG SWEDEN'S BLUE RIBBON



Tåtorp - Sjötorp

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GÖTA KANAL



Cycling and hiking along the Göta Canal

Hiking or cycling along the Göta Canal is a breeze. You follow the towpath, where no cars are allowed, and will always have the canal in view. This guide will lead you from Tåtorp by Lake Viken to Sjötorp by Lake Vänern, and provide interesting information along your journey. The distance from Tåtorp to Sjötorp is 35 kilometres, and the total altitude difference is 48 metres. Along the way, there are several sights to see, rest stops, eateries serving lunch, and public toilets.

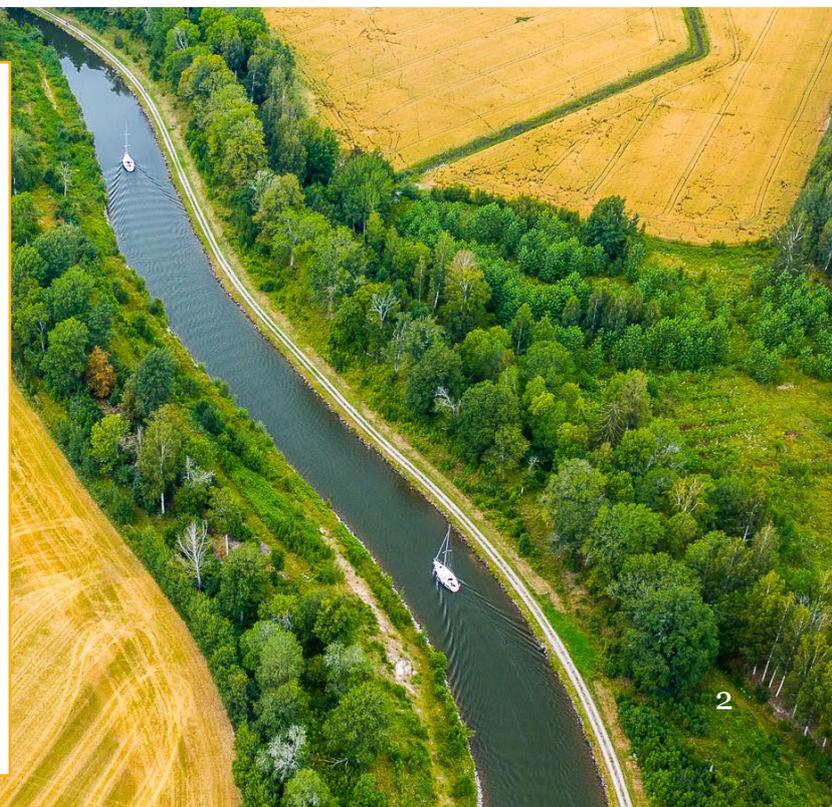
Here you will find information about the waterways, locks, and bridges, as well as historical facts that you may find interesting. You are about to begin an exciting adventure, and an experience out of the ordinary, in an amazing natural environment, where you can feel the wings of history beating along the way.

Welcome!

History of the Göta Canal

The Göta Canal is one of the largest construction projects ever undertaken in Sweden. It runs between Mem next to the Baltic Sea and Sjötorp at Lake Vänern. A distance of 190 km, out of which 87 km were dug by hand.

Construction of the canal began in 1810 under the direction of Vice Admiral Baltzar von Platen. Soldiers from across the land were billeted here for the construction. The ground-breaking took place in Motala, at the same time as work started in Forsvik and in Sjötorp. Three years later the canal's first lock was completed at Forsvik. After a further four years, the canal was navigable between Motala and Hajstorp. It took a long time to build the canal. A total of 58,000 men; Swedish soldiers, Russian deserters (200 of them) and a number of civilian workers, laboured on the construction. The western section between Sjötorp and Karlsborg was completed in 1822, and ten years later, 1832, the final stretch between Motala and Mem was inaugurated, and the whole of the Göta Canal was completed.





Tåtorp

Tåtorp is the start destination of your cycling- or hiking tour, here the canal continues after Lake Viken. In Tåtorp stands the semaphore that previously stood on Lanthöjden.

Here too is one of the canal's two manually operated locks, the other is in Borensberg in Östergötland. This lock was built in 1814 and was named Daniel Thunberg after the man who drew the first canal plans. The lock at Tåtorp is a level lock, which regulates the water height between the canal and Lake Viken, and has a rise of 0.2 meters.

From Tåtorp you cycle or hike west along the towpath on the right hand side of the canal. Now you come across more and more forest and hills, and close to the canal ferns grow, you can also find blueberries and lingonberries amongst the trees near the canal. The stretch from Tåtorp to Lanthöjden also belongs to Bergkanalen, here the canal builders had to blast through the bedrock and it took seven years to complete.

Bergkanalen - Lanthöjden

After about three kilometres you come to Bergkanalen, this stretch of canal was built during the years 1931 – 1933, and thus the 900-meter long and narrow passage around Lanthöjden was

reduced by half. This accomplishment was happily received, especially by the larger ships that plied the canal, as the narrow stretch had caused much misery with such things as broken propellers and difficult encounters.

The old stretch is no longer navigable for larger boats because today there are fixed bridges over the canal, but it is a perfect canoe route. On the island that was created when the new stretch was built, stands an obelisk declaring that Lanthöjden is the highest land point on the Göta Canal, 91.5 meters above sea level.

Pojken ("The Boy")

by Bianca Maria Barmen 2009

Excerpt from the jury's justification: "Bianca Maria Barmen has with her sculpture group, drawn together a true story surrounding the transport of the Obelisk, worked in stone, to Lanthöjden. This Obelisk marks the highest point of the Göta Canal, 91.5 meters above sea level, in Töreboda municipality, between Tåtorp and Vassbacken. Bianca Maria Barmen also evokes through this work, her own experiences of the canal during the journeys of childhood..."

Vassbacken

After having cycled or hiked a total of five and a half kilometres from Tåtorp, past Lanthöjden, you come to Vassbacken. This place is like an oasis in the middle of the countryside, today you will find a café, a campsite and a hostel here, but previously this place, as with so many others along the canal, was an important transshipment point.

Around Vassbacken were many large farms, and here the district's grain farmers loaded and unloaded their wares, the small warehouse was housed in the café building and there was also a large warehouse, which has now been demolished.

Jonsboda

At Jonsboda bridge, the new bridge-keeper's lodge was built in wood in 1880. Carl Andersson was the first to move in. This bridge-keeper and blacksmith remained at his post for 43 years, from 1858 until his death in 1901. Then came Anders Gustaf Engren, also a blacksmith. Engren was the bridge-keeper in Jonsboda for 19 years. The next one was called Svensson, he too was a blacksmith. Svensson lived in Jonsboda from 1920 to 1952.

In 1965 the job of bridge-keeper in Jonsboda was amalgamated with the one in Stång. Today the bridge-keeper in Stång also remotely controls Jonsboda bridge. Today a Café is run in the bridge-keeper's cottage in Jonsboda, and a camping site as well as parking for motorhomes are available.

At Jonsboda it is necessary to cross the canal in order to continue to follow the old towpath. Now a level cycling or hiking of about five kilometres

The Posthouse in Vassbacken

During the years 1830 – 1864 there was a postal station by the name of Vassbacken. When the Göta Canal's western section was inaugurated, Vassbacken became a hub where the canal met the old highway. The mail stagecoach between the county town of Mariestad and Wanäs by Lake Vättern (now Karlsborg), stopped here. A little building, which stood by the lock inspector's house, was fitted with bars and became the post office with the lock inspector as postmaster. Today the post office is a little museum run by Moholm's Local History Association, with exhibits on the Göta Canal and Vassbacken's postal history.

Three and a half kilometres now remain before you arrive at Jonsboda. First however you must pass the roller bridge in Stång, from where the bridges in Jonsboda and Vassbacken are also remotely operated.

awaits you through lovely pastoral landscape before you get to the next bridge at Rotkilen and Töreboda. You can now see that the landscape has altered from the forest and hills around Tåtorp to an open landscape of fields and meadows.



The white canal boats

If you are lucky during your cycling or hiking you may see one of the three large white canal boats, which cruise the stretch Stockholm – Gothenburg and back. These boats belong to Rederi AB Göta Kanal, not to be confused with AB Göta kanalbolag, who are commissioned by the owners, the Swedish Sate, to maintain and develop the Göta Canal. These three boats are built to fit exactly the Göta Canal locks and bridges.

M/S Juno is the oldest of the ships, she was built in 1874 at the Motala Verkstad and is the world's oldest ship with cabin facilities. The most recent renovation was in 2003 and in 2004 the ship was "K-märkt" (listed), which means she is considered of historical cultural importance by the National Maritime Museum.

M/S Wilhelm Tham is, just like M/S Juno, built at the Motala Verkstad, and she was completed in 1912. The ship has 25 cabins spread over three decks providing places for 50 passengers. "Thammen" (The Tham) is also listed ("K-märkt"), like her colleague Juno.

M/S Diana is the youngest of the boats and was built at the Finnboda wharf outside Stockholm in 1931. Differing from the other two ships, M/S Diana's salon and dining room are combined, making her suitable for conferences and meetings of up to 50 people. Diana too is listed. ("K-märkt")



Töreboda

Töreboda municipality has around 9,000 inhabitants. Also included in the municipality are the urban areas of Moholm and Älgårås. Distinctive of Töreboda is that here the tranquil traffic of the Göta Canal is crossed by the main western railway carrying the Gothenburg to Stockholm express. The area is characterised by a variety of businesses and several large industries.

When the canal was built there was no railway, it first arrived in 1859. For a long time Töreboda was a thriving trading place where the railway and the canal mutually benefited each other, and several transshipment warehouses were built. There were many shipping companies that cooperated with the railway companies, thus it is not strange that it was decided to place the entrance to Töreboda's large red brick station house next to the canal, as that is where most of the traffic came from.

From the bridge-keeper's house in Töreboda, the bridge-keeper controls a number of bridges, remotely operating the following; Rotkilen, Töreboda road bridge and rail bridge, Gastorp and Lövsäng.

After the rail bridge you must follow the signs and cross over the canal by the road bridge. But before the rail bridge and station house, you may take a trip on Sweden's smallest ferry, Lina.

When leaving Töreboda you will pass the guest harbour and on the north side of the canal lies a camp site with its cabins with open-air swimming pool. On the outskirts of Töreboda lies Gastorp's roller bridge after which there is a stretch of about four kilometres before you arrive in Hajstorp.

Lina

- Sweden's smallest ferry

It was not a boat skipper, but a retired train driver who took the initiative for the only regular boat transverse connection across the Göta Canal. Oskar Lindhult was born in 1857 and retired in 1917. After a couple of years Oskar needed something to keep him busy. He knew that those who lived in the Börstorp area, on the other side of the canal in Töreboda, were always forced to take the long way around to get into the community. In 1919 he started the first ferry crossing, with a skiff, which he himself rowed or "twisted" back and forth over the canal. For his trouble he took 5 öre per person for a single journey. In this way Oskar gained both employment and a purpose but he had also set in motion something that would be used by many people. In the 1940s the Töreboda community took over the ferry and made it "public transport".

Excerpt from the book "Göta kanal den blå vattenvägen genom Sverige" by Svahn/Nordholm, 2004



Tree planting

When the canal was new trees were planted along several stretches, different tree varieties were tried out, such as linden, maple, ash and Swedish whitebeam. The tree planting continued, in particular during the 1860s when thousands of trees were planted. In those days there were trees planted the entire length except where the forest reached to the canal. However after a time it was discovered that tree planting created problems in certain places where the trees grew fast, and the roots stretched down into the canal embankment and destroyed the support walls of packed clay (a mixture of fine sand and clay). This created leaks, which could be very serious. There was nothing to be done but to remove several trees from those places where the canal was narrowest.

In 1999 the Göta Canal Company once again made a decision to replant the tree alleys along the canal. Today about 100 trees are replanted each year, and the tree varieties most commonly used are maple and linden. On the stretch between Västra Ljungs Bridge and Sjöbacka, you can see newly planted trees on both sides of the canal, maple and linden.

Excavated canal

The western section comprises 37 kilometres – the eastern section 50 kilometres – excavated canal. The excavated earth would virtually be the equivalent of a 5 meter-high and 1 meter-wide wall from Treriksröset to Smygehuk (the northern tip of Sweden to the southern tip). Why not? The canal is 3 meters deep, 26 meters wide on the surface and 14 meters wide across the bottom. The aggregate was just right to dike the canal and avoid floods.

Brothers John and Nils Ericsson

In July 1810 the former mining foreman Olof Ericsson came to Forsvik. His two sons, Nils and John, were at that time eight and seven years old respectively.

John developed an interest in drawing and model building early on, among other things he had, as a six year old, constructed a detailed miniature of a mine. In the year 1815 the canal school in Tåtorp was founded, the first technical further educational college in Sweden. The brothers John and Nils received their training here when they were accepted as cadets in the Swedish Navy mechanics corps. Amongst other things they learned planimetry, geometry and the art of shading mechanical drawings or elevations on maps. Baltzar von Platen got to know of John's great skill, and already by twelve years of age John was given responsibility for the major task of compiling drawings of the western section of the Göta Canal. Later John was given the job of deputy leveller at the Riddarhagen's workstation, subsequently being responsible for levelling at Töreboda and Rotkilen. This meant that several hundred men were dependent on the instructions of a young teenage boy.

John Ericsson later became further renowned when he invented the propeller and developed the armoured ship Monitor, which was used by the navy of the American Union States to defeat the Confederacy. Nils Ericsson stayed in Sweden and was involved, among other things in the building of the Trollhätte Canal, he was also assigned the position of building controller for the main line when the rail network was developed.

Excerpt from the book "Göta kanal den blå vattenvägen genom Sverige" by Svahn/Nordholm, 2004



Hajstorp

In September 1822 the western section of the Göta Canal was inaugurated. Hajstorp then received its first visit from a Swedish King. To loud cheering, Karl XIV Johan stepped ashore in Hajstorp at six in the evening on the 23rd September, where a dinner and party were waiting. Later that evening Baltzar von Platen received the Serafimerordens blå band (The Royal Order of the Seraphim).

One hundred years later came the next king to visit Hajstorp, now the king was called Gustav V. At the beginning of the 1900s a memorial stone had been erected in Hajstorp, the king added a plaque bearing his signature at this 100-year jubilee.

In Hajstorp there is also one of the few preserved rolling bridges from the Motala Verkstad (Motala Workshop). Before you get there you will be able to see the former canal engineer's grand wooden villa on the left, with two small gazebos, Lahrin's pavilions. Standing on the towpath between the Engineer's Villa and the Blacksmith is a memorial stone, which was erected at the beginning of the 1900s.

A Café and Hostel are housed in the lock-keeper's house today. And in the old harbour warehouse on the other side of the canal, handicrafts by the

Association of Artisans from around the canal are for sale, as well as an exhibition run by Töreboda's Local History Association.

M/S Ariadne

In the summer of 1956, the canal boat Ariadne had participated in the production of Swedish feature film Skorpan, starring people such as Nils Poppe, Marianne Bengtsson and Holger Löwenadler. Filming was done at the Berg locks and in Söderköping, but also near Töreboda.

On the night of June 30-July 1, 1956, Adriane was going west on the canal, after filming had finished. In the lower lock at Hajstorp, the crew failed to stop the vessel. The cause was either a faulty manoeuvre, or an incorrect order from the bridge. The result was that Ariadne went full steam ahead instead of stopping, and rammed the middle gate, made a precipitous drop and crushed the lower gate too.

No people were hurt, but the material damage was large, as the ship, and the water held by the lock, crushed the gate. With two gates now gone, the result was a total block on the canal, for two weeks in the middle of summer.

Excerpt from the book "Göta kanal den blå vattenvägen genom Sverige" by Svahn/Nordholm, 2004

After a fairly flat cycling or hiking from Tåtorp it gets really steep here in Hajstorp. Here we have the double lock Hajstorp Övre (Upper Hajstorp), Thomas Telford (Baltzar von Platen´s Scottish advisor) and the double lock Hajstorp Nedre (Lower Hajstorp) Krigsmakten (The Armed Forces). Together the four locks have a rise of 10.1 meters.

At Riksberg, right below Hajstorp, you can see a triple lock, named for the canal's founder, Baltzar von Platen, the lock steps have a total rise of 7.5 meters. Before the canal continues after Riksberg, you pass a rolling bridge. Just over one kilometre further along the canal bank you will come upon Godhögen with its double lock. This lock is named Vetenskaperna (The Sciences). It was built in 1822 and has a total rise of 5.1 meters. After Godhögen you continue about 2 kilometres toward Norrkvarn. Here the canal moves through a more open landscape and beautiful surroundings.

Norrkvarn

The lock right after the rolling bridge, which takes the car traffic over the canal, is called Slöjderna (Handicrafts). Next to the upper lock lies Kalkboden, here there is an exhibition showing the significance of Norrkvarn in the canal construction. A marked culture trail of just over 500 meters also starts from here, with signs giving information on the cultural historic environment in the countryside around the area. The next lock, Norrkvarn nedre, is called Samuel Bagge. Now there is a stretch of about two kilometres before you reach the community of Lyrestad, to get there you must pass under the E20 by the walkway alongside the canal.

Norrkvarn's Workstation 1810-1823

The workstation in Norrkvarn was important to the canal construction. From here 5.8 kilometres of canal would be completed. Many technical problems existed in Norrkvarn, which had to be solved. Water courses had to be crossed, Fredsberg bog had to be drained and high embankments were required. Norrkvarn's mill dating from 1927 lies 200 meters to the south of the bridge. The four-floor building was constructed on a site with a long history of mills. The buildings were totally renovated in 2004 and today house *Norrkvarn's Hotel and Conference Centre*.

Rosa eko - inre eld (pink echo – inner fire) Katarina Norling 2012

The artist says the following about her work of art by the Göta Canal:

"The art work 'Rosa eko – inre eld' is a portal leading into the landscape. But when the Göta Canal is still one can also see the portal, the flames and the exhibit reflected in the water. Then it is a portal leading directly into the water..."



Lyrestad

Lyrestad is a community with approximately 450 inhabitants. In Lyrestad the canal passes under no fewer than three bridges, one for the European route E20, one for the main road and one for the railway. Here, von Platen imagined that a large town would grow... but this dream was not realized.

Between the years 1823 and 1824 the large canal warehouse was built in Lyrestad. For many years the warehouse was used for loading and storing goods being transported out of, or further into the country. Since the middle of the 1970s the warehouse has been owned by Lyrestad's Local History Association, which has renovated the building and opened a museum.

Now follow a stretch of path of approximately two kilometres bringing you to the bridge at Rogstorp. Right before Rogstorp in the fields to the left one can see a large stone in the shape of a juniper bush. This is the Rogstorp stone, a rune stone, which is over a thousand years old, with cross markings and animal reliefs.

After a further couple of kilometres cycling or hiking it is once again time for the canal to flow down towards Vänern. The first double lock is Sjötorp 7-8, Sjötorp 8 is christened Handeln (Trade) and Sjötorp 7 is called Bergsbruket (Mining) The cottage in which the lock-keeper lived was constructed in 1895, it is built on a foundation of cut granite. When stone houses were replaced by wooden houses in the 1890s, "snickarglädjen" (carpenter's joy) thrived, which is clearly visible on this cottage.

Niklas Nilsson

The yellow cabin by the lock used to be home to the lock keeper, who lived and worked here in Sjötorp. It was built in 1859, in wood, on a base of cut granite rock.

Niklas Nilsson worked here at the Sjötorp locks 7-8 for all of 50 years. He began his work on the first of April in 1857 and left on the same date in 1912. He was twice awarded the medal of the Royal Patriotic Society, first in 1882 when he received the small medal and then later in 1906 when he received the honour of the society's large medal.

Ester Bergman

In 1929, Ester Bergman rowed from Stockholm to Göteborg. An odd way to travel, especially for a woman and especially at the time.

History does not reveal, however, whether Ester actually rowed the entire distance by herself. There are no details about her journey whatsoever. But her story was written down on a postcard, preserved at the local history museum in Lyrestad.

*Excerpt from the book
"Göta kanal – bilder från västra linjen"
by Owe E Hermansson, 2002*

After the double lock Sjötorp 7-8 the canal makes a sharp turn to the left, this is known as the Smörgåsekröken (Sandwich-bend). After one more kilometre you will reach another lock, Sjötorp 6 is a single lock with a rise of 2.4 meters, the name of the lock is Jordbruket (Agriculture).

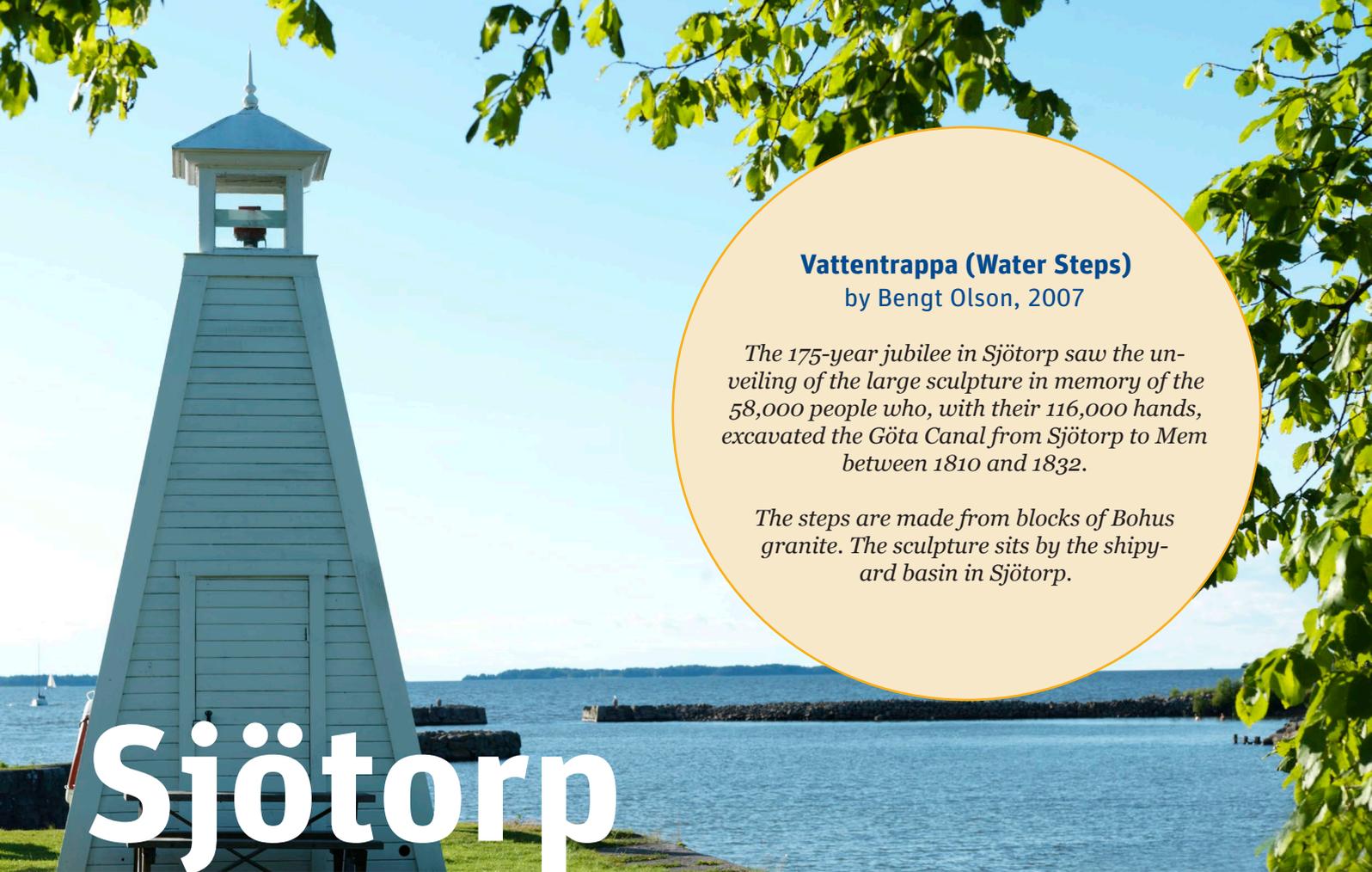
Here, by Sjötorp's sixth lock, is a unique lockkeeper's house. The original cottage probably dated from the 1810s. The oldest lockkeeper's cottages were often constructed of natural stone, as was this one. These 9 cottages were very cold in winter, which explains why new houses were built and the old ones demolished. The new building was constructed in 1921. It is of wood and is larger than most of the canal houses.

The next double lock is Sjötorp 4-5, Sjötorp 5 has been christened Bönderna (The Farmers) and Sjötorp 5 Borgarna (The Burghers). After this double bridge the canal passes below a modern drawbridge, which leads the main road over the canal.

"Alnstones"

Drivers who were responsible for the draught animals along the Göta Canal wanted to be paid for their service.

To simplify the remuneration system, "alnstones" were placed along the length of the canal. A total of 143 stones were erected at intervals of 594 metres (equal to 1,000 "alnar"). The cost of hiring a pair of oxen to pull a vessel 1,000 "alnar" was approximately eight "öre" (1 SEK = 100 öre) at the end of the 19th century.



Vattentrappa (Water Steps)

by Bengt Olson, 2007

The 175-year jubilee in Sjötorp saw the unveiling of the large sculpture in memory of the 58,000 people who, with their 116,000 hands, excavated the Göta Canal from Sjötorp to Mem between 1810 and 1832.

The steps are made from blocks of Bohus granite. The sculpture sits by the shipyard basin in Sjötorp.

Sjötorp

You have soon reached the end of this cycle- or hiking tour. This port on Vänern is an idyllic little community. Baltzar von Platen however had bigger plans for Sjötorp, which was to have been a town. This never happened, though its position by the canal and Vänern beach means that many tourists want to linger and enjoy the beautiful surroundings, and experience the special atmosphere in Sjötorp.

In conjunction with the canal construction, Sjötorp's Wharf was built, incorporating a blacksmith and dry-dock which were used for the repair of the boats that plied the canal. Today the wharf functions as a workshop for canal repairs on the western section.

On the quay lies the Café Baltzar von Platen, where Swedish fika and food is served during the summer months. There is also a small shop. The upper floor of the port warehouse hosts an expo on the Göta Canal and its maritime traffic.

After the bridge over the main road that leads through Sjötorp, lies the next pair of locks, Sjötorp 2-3. Sjötorp 2 was christened Adeln (The Nobility) and, Sjötorp 3 Prästerna (The Priesthood). This is the canal's first double lock with a rise of 4.8 meters. Together with Sjötorp's lock 4-5, lock 2-3 complete a unit, they represent "The Kingdom's Four Estates" (nobles, priests, burghers and farmers).

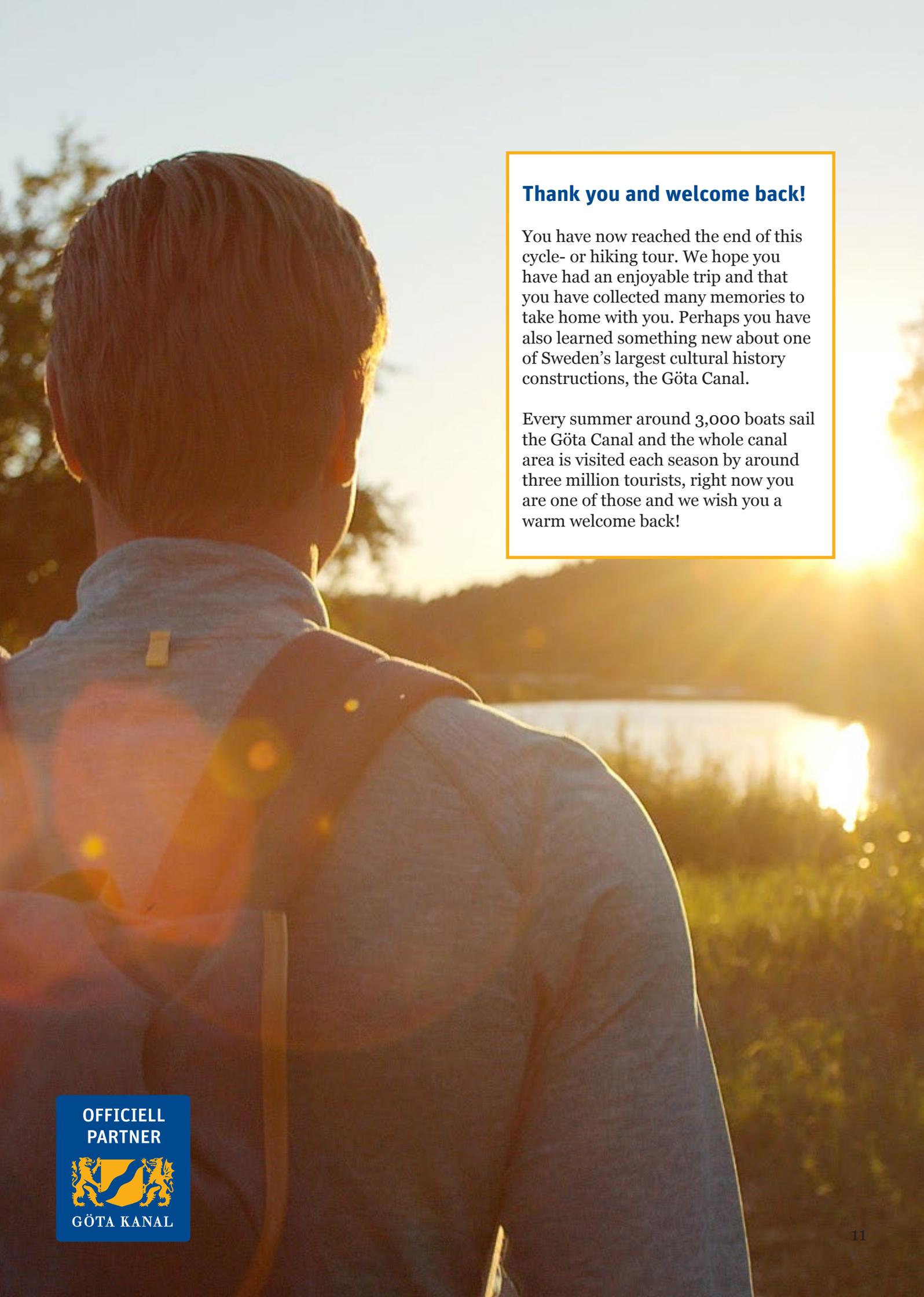
The last lock, the lake lock, which allows access into lake Vänern, is called Konstitutionen (The Constitution) after the new form of government adopted when Gustav IV was toppled from the throne. To the east of the lock there is a stone table, where it is believed that King Karl XIV Johan enjoyed his breakfast on the 23rd September 1822, at the inauguration of the western section.

The Thörn family

In 1899, Anders Thörn began his employment as keeper of the lock and bridge at Sjötorp. His position included two locks and a bridges, a keeper's house, and free access to firewood. The boats serviced the canal both day and night, and the keeper had to wake from his sleep to go out, open hatches, wait for water to rise, and then open the gate. Thörn handled the double lock by himself. The bridge was easier to handle, cranked by hand, and could be operated by Mrs Thörn and later, their children.

Having the support of a family was crucial – then you just needed the strength to operate the large crank. Despite the irregular hours and toilsome work, the job did come with a certain – unspoken – prestige. If nothing else, it provided the opportunity to wear a uniform on ceremonious occasions. Between 1930 and 1952, the son Gustav Thörn held the same position as his father once did, and both were also carpenters.

Excerpt from the book "Göta kanal – bilder från västra linjen" by Owe E Hermansson, 2002



Thank you and welcome back!

You have now reached the end of this cycle- or hiking tour. We hope you have had an enjoyable trip and that you have collected many memories to take home with you. Perhaps you have also learned something new about one of Sweden's largest cultural history constructions, the Göta Canal.

Every summer around 3,000 boats sail the Göta Canal and the whole canal area is visited each season by around three million tourists, right now you are one of those and we wish you a warm welcome back!

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