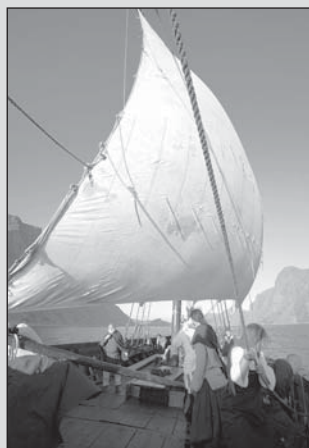


The history of Lofotr Viking Museum

■ Julie SÆTHER
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Frik-Harald Bjerkli, farmer on the Lofoten Islands – as far north in Norway as the Polar Circle, made a unique discovery in his field in 1981. The soil was particularly black, and rare objects saw the light of day. He contacted Kåre Ringstad, an amateur archaeologist on the island of Vestvågøy. They got in touch with scientists at the University of Tromsø, who immediately understood that this was something out of the ordinary; glass beads and French potsherds more than 1000 year old had never been found this far north before.

From 1983 to 1989 archaeological excavations were



■ Fig. 1 Lofotr at sea



■ Fig. 2 Being part of the crew

carried out, with specialist scholars from several Nordic countries. These excavations uncovered the largest house ever found from late Iron Age Europe. In the late fifth/early sixth century AD a 67 m house was erected at Borg, this house had several building-phases. In the eighth century it was completely rebuilt to a house consisting of five rooms and a length of 83 metres.

The southern end of the house was interpreted as living-quarters with a central hearth (called “boligdel”). The midden was placed outside this room along the northern wall. The next room (“gang”) had two exits and was the main entrance room. The third room (“gildehall”) had a large central hearth and was interpreted as a banquet hall. Most of the luxury items found at Borg were discovered in relation to the north-eastern corner of this room. There were no particular finds in the fourth room, and it may have been a storage-room (“lager”). The fifth room was most probably a byre/stable (“fjøsdel”).

Among the finds from the large house at Borg there were iron- and soapstone artefacts such as knives and spindle-whorls. Such objects were important in everyday work at the farm. Luxury items like glass beads, glass with gold pattern, Tatinger ware, gilded bronze harness fitting and gold-leaf amulets all indicated great wealth.

From written sources it is known that a chief named Olaf Tvennumbrunni lived on Vestvågøy in the 9th century, and that he settled on Iceland in the 870s. Was he one of the chieftains of Borg?



■ Fig. 3 The reconstructed Viking house one day in April



■ Fig. 4 Visitors participating in a ring dance on the Viking festival

Reconstructions at Borg

“Lofotr” is a reconstruction of the famous Gokstad ship, a 23 meter long ship discovered in a Viking grave near Oslo. It is built from pine and oak, is clinkerwork and has 16 pairs of oars. It is a very good seagoing ship, tested in rough waters in North Norway.

We have also reconstructed a smaller sailboat called “Femkeipingen”. The original was found in relation with the Gokstad ship. The femkeiping is approximately 10 m long and has five pairs of oars. We use the boat for rowing and sailing in “Borgepollen”.

Our third ship is Vargfotr, a smaller version of the Gokstad ship. Around “Borge-

pollen” several boathouses (“naust”) have been registered, one of them has been large enough for a ship of Lofotr’s size.

During winter, Lofotr’s “home” is in a boathouse that was reconstructed on the basis of one excavated at Rennesøy in Rogaland, more southwards in Norway.

The smithy was built in 1997, and is a reconstruction based on different sources.

Last but not least; the 1:1 reconstruction of the great 83 m long chieftain’s house on the hilltop at Borg. The building is oriented in the same direction (NE-SW) but was erected 20 metres from the original house. The grand living history-museum was opened in 1995.



■ Fig. 5 Wood carver at work

Other Projects

In addition to *liveARCH*, Lofotr Vikingmuseum has been involved in several projects:

CULTURE 2000:

The first Millennium Project: "Travels in time"

This project involved Ireland, Scotland and Norway. The subject was the first millennium AD and both differences and similarities between the countries, for example in the transition from pagan to early Christian beliefs and in the development of the Viking culture. The project connects the history of the three countries through interactive and wide reaching media: www.travelsin-time.net.

Interreg III B:

Northern Periphery: "Sagalands", "NORCE"

"Sagalands" was a project that included seven countries; Iceland, Scotland, Sweden, Greenland, Faroe Islands, Canada and Norway. The project was about reviving sagas and storytelling as ways to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next. To protect the landscape where the stories actually took place, was also an important part of the project. www.sagalands.org

"NORCE" (Northern Coastal Experience) involved several countries besides Norway. The Project was about modern tourism and experience within the existing coastal culture. www.norce.org

Interreg III B: Baltic Area: "Ancient times"

This project also involved several countries. The project was about appreciating the diversity in ancient culture in the first millennium AD. www.ancienttimes.net

"Vikingresan" (Viking travels)

is under development. Viking culture and travels are the project's main focus, which includes countries in Northern Europe. Every country contributes with their stories and finds connected to the Viking-age.

"Arena"

is a production of experience connected to tourism.

Work

With the Visitor

As a living history-museum the visitor is our main focus. In the summertime from May 15th to September 15th we have over 60 000 visitors, and the number is increasing. During the summer season there are guides in Viking clothes who receive groups and single visitors. Besides exploring the house, tourists are welcome to embark Lofotr and try their rowing skills. Being part of a Viking ship crew is a popular experience. Bareback horse riding is just one of the other activities one can participate in during the summer. In- and outside the chieftain's house different kinds of old crafts are being carried out. The visitor may see shoemakers, woodcarvers, weavers or blacksmiths at work.

Every second year a Sagaplay is performed on the museum, and every year a Viking festival takes place at Borg. During the festival around 100 "Vikings" from all over Europe come together to trade their Viking-products, "fight" and entertain the public.

In the winter the museum is open one day a week. In addition guided tours can be arranged for bigger groups. It is also possible to order banquets in the chieftain's hall, with or without "the chieftain" as host. A good feast at Borg is a memorable experience.

In cooperation with Hurtigruten (The Coastal Express – cruise ships) we offer a tour called "Hunting the light". The tourists are taken on a trip from the Hurtigruten ship to Borg, where they have a meal and get entertained. Our staff make a part of history come to life as they create a scene from an offering to the gods, originally called "Blot".

Lofotr Vikingmuseum has a close cooperation with schools in the region, and the museum has its own support-group (Friends of Lofotr). The Vikingmuseum also works together with the travel industry in Lofoten and Nordland County.

The area around Borg is full of history and pre-history. On the hilltop where the chieftain's house is situated, there are numerous traces of houses, covering a time span of nearly 2000 years! One can view a Middle age house-site and the remains of the old church site. If you follow our system of paths past the harbour and Lofotr, you will see burial mounds and boat house foundations, all adding up to the picture of Borg being an important power centre in the Iron-Age.

The spectacular Borge Church makes the sacred heights complete. The church was built in the late 1980's, after the previous church burned down when struck by lightning.

Summary

L'histoire du Musée Viking de Lofotr

Les îles Lofoten dans le Nord de la Norvège sont riches de vestiges archéologiques. Le Musée Viking de Lofotr comprend la reconstitution d'une maison aristocratique de la fin de l'Age du fer et propose aux visiteurs de naviguer sur son bateau Viking ou de monter à cru ses chevaux.

Die Geschichte des Wikinger Museums der Lofoten

Die Inselgruppe der Lofoten im nördlichen Norwegen weist eine große Zahl von archäologischen Funden auf. Die Rekonstruktion eines späteisenzeitlichen Hauses eines Kleinkönigs ist Bestandteil des Wikinger Museums der Lofoten, welches seinen Besuchern auch die Möglichkeit bietet, ein rekonstruiertes Wikingerschiff zu rudern oder wie die Wikinger ohne Sattel zu reiten.