



Report on the Study Tour of Fröjel

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1. The area

The parish of Fröjel lies on the south west coast of Gotland. In extent, it is about 5km by 5km. It has a winter population of about 300 people, which at least doubles in summer. It is an area of thin soils with forests, and grazing fields, interspersed with many old farmhouses. The coastline of Fröjel is marked by a mix of sandy beaches, shingle beaches and sea meadows, plus a small working harbour at Djopvik. Along much of the coast, there is a bluff of pine forest where much of the tourist accommodation is located. The coast is particularly important for migrant birds especially swans and geese, and the limestone geology gives rise to a rich native flora. The islands of Little and Large Karlsö are also world famous for birds.

Fröjel is a long settled area with more ancient foundations than any other part of Gotland.

There are significant archaeological remains from the Bronze Age and Iron Age, and many Viking finds, notably the harbour at Fröjel and the burial ship. The church is mainly 11th century and an associated labyrinth gives the Parish its name (from 'Freja', the Goddess of Fertility and Love, and 'Al', meaning holy).

A two-day study tour revealed that most of the tourism products relate to accommodation and outdoor activities. The accommodation is mainly in the form of second or summer homes, chalets, caravans and campsites, plus a hostel in a riding school, accommodation in a recreational village, and cabins in a summer camp. The activities include the Fröjel Discovery programme, based on the Viking harbour; a café and rural museum, associated with that harbour; a Centre for the Riders Association with its own facilities; and horse riding, shooting, cycle hire, nature trails, swimming and beach recreation, plus ferries to the islands. There is a conference centre in the summer camp.

Five types of tourist have been identified for the parish :

- Swedish householders who own a second home there
- Tourists who take rented accommodation for the summer ; these also tend to be Swedish though some are Danish, Norwegian , Finnish, American and German
- Those visiting the area to take part in active archaeology at the Fröjel Discovery Programme : these come from all over the world
- Children wishing to take part in horse training
- Wedding parties and confirmation classes at Fröjelgården.

2. Case studies

2.1. Hembygdsföringen and the Folkskola cafe

The Folkskola (a disused school-house) lies just below the parish church and stone labyrinth. This summer it was opened, on the initiative of the local history group (Hembygdsföringen), as a café and a rural museum to display artefacts that have been discovered at the adjoining archaeological dig, the Fröjel Discovery Programme. Displays include a picture stone, brooches, bracelets and many other items. It is jointly managed by Karin Backlund who moved here thirty years ago, and Berit Onsjö, a Gotlander married to the local vet.

The café also sells crafts including sheepskins, pottery, jewellery, honey and honey mustard, and wax candles. LEADER+ funding was secured for refurbishment of the kitchen, employing 6 young people for an eight-week period, and marketing. (The café is marketed in the local press and the Gotland guide). Volunteer time was used as match funding.

Karin and Berit have employed their children in the kitchen, and both women seem interested in the future of children on Gotland. Berit moved back here in order to raise children in a rural environment, which she feels is ideal for growing up in. She is working in Visby with young people, providing advice to girls on sex education and other issues. Opportunities for young people are limited - the new University in Visby is small, and most courses would require moving students to move to the mainland. Job opportunities are also limited, although there are very few 20-25 year olds and unemployment levels are low.

Karin Backlund is an active member of the community and sits on the board of the Hembygdsföringen, although she feels that local people still see her as a newcomer. She is concerned about poor public transport provision and the closure of local schools, which means that children sometimes have long journeys to get to school, and could not easily get about to do other activities.

The Hembygdsföringen has been active in promoting the café and museum, and encouraging local schools to involve children in the Fröjel Discovery programme. Virtually all the people in the parish are members of the group, which meets four times a year for lectures and slide shows. These events also raise funds for the café and museum.

The summer season only runs from early June to mid August, after which the museum closes. In the winter, the schoolroom will be used for evening lectures for the community. Next year they intend to extend the rural museum, and in the future hope to add an extra room to the school.

2.2 Gannarve Gård

Gannarve Gård – a privately owned horse farm and guesthouse – is sited beside the main road through the parish. It is a large farm, running down to the sea meadows on the Baltic shore. Kerstin Olofsson inherited the land from her father, and started the horse riding enterprise with 2 buildings in 1961. She and her daughter now run the enterprise, which includes a guesthouse with 6 rooms and a small restaurant, lodgings for children who come on riding courses, an indoor horse training track, and trails around the farm for use by horse riders.

The land also holds a remarkable archaeological site, a bronze age burial in the shape of a ship, very easily accessible beside the main road. In the farm buildings, and little seen by visitors, is a collection of carriages from the last century, assembled by Kerstin's father : Kerstin does not have the resources to maintain this collection properly. .

There are about 40 horses, mainly mares, 4 ponies and (at any time) a small number of foals, which are mainly used to replace the ageing horses.

Gannarve Gård is open to tourists from the beginning of June until the end of August not only for horse riding, but also accommodation and full board in the nicely furnished restaurant, which is itself almost a small museum with old ceramic plates and old-style furniture. Gannarve Gård also offers horse-riding courses for children in winter.

Although the main season is very short, Kerstin is satisfied with the number of tourists and horse-riding children who visit her camp. The main target group are children, who represent 70% of all the guests. 90% of the guests come from the Swedish mainland, the rest are mainly foreign tourists who spend their holiday on Gotland. Each course lasts about two weeks with 14-19 participants, so she has about 80 guests in the high season. Besides organising horseback-riding, Kerstin deals also with horse-breeding, she sells 1 or 2 horses each year but this is not her main business.

Gannarve Gård is a member of the Gotland Tourist Association and the Swedish Horseback Riding Camps, which handles part of the marketing. Kerstin is also advertising her courses in the local newspapers, but she finds this way of marketing too costly. The farm has its own Website, which Kerstin sees as the cheapest way to make horseback-riding courses popular.

Kerstin finances her business from her training, although she gets some money from the European Union Agri-Environmental scheme for managing the sea meadows. She works together with her 2 daughters on the site and two permanent employees in the restaurant in the high season. She also has a part-time employee who takes care of the horses.

Gannarve Gård is a typical rural family business with a good potential of growing in a really favourable rural area and with a nice, quiet beach. Besides her horseback-riding courses, additional services could be offered based on the advantageous geographical position of the site. However, Kerstin feels that she has already reached the optimal level of her business.

2.3. Mulde recreational village

Härje Hallgren is a builder with his own construction company, based in a village at some distance from Fröjel. But in Fröjel he has created the Mulde recreational village which offers:

- Accommodation with self-catering (for 15 families) : to serve them, Härje organises newspapers and bread supplies onto the site.
- Crayfish lakes, from which the product goes to Stockholm and attracts very good prices.
- 2 nature trails - 2 km and 4 km long, with 20 signs.
- Pheasants as an attraction for visitors.
- Deer as an attraction for visitors.
- 10 bicycles for renting
- Boules, table tennis
- Shooting rabbits in wintertime

In addition, he has a 18 hectare forest, from which he produces timber for his own use (by selling the standing trees and then buying back the planks); wood for

charcoal production; Christmas trees for selling in Gotland; chips for his heating system; and truffles.

Härje is a very creative person, impulsive and at same time very practical. He has two daughters and a son. His son is reconstructing the old house, which was built in 1905 to a standard pattern produced by an English woman, using bricks which had been produced by a brick works on the site. The clay that was used gave Härje the idea that the land would be suitable for crayfish farming.

Härje bought the farm with 85 hectares in 1989. He started to build houses and to establish the crayfish ponds. After 14 months he started to offer accommodation. He got 10% support from government for the capital costs of creating the crayfish ponds and the chalets for tourists.

The landscape that he has created around the ponds, with mounds made from the excavated spoil, is quite atypical of Gotland and his inventiveness and practicality has led to many interesting features. He aims to complete the landscaping in four years' time. He is currently completing a large barn, to be used for conference services and crayfish parties. He hopes that his son will continue his project.

Mulde recreational village has a website, and Härje co-operates with the travel agency in Visby. Advertising is mainly by "word of mouth". The target groups for the tourism enterprise are :

- Families with children, mainly from Sweden
- Retired people, in the early summer
- Experienced hunters.

From June to the end of August, the site has about 90 staying visitors per week.

2.4. Fröjelgården

Fröjelgården is a holiday camp set among mature pine trees on the slope between the main road and the coast. It offers cabins and a small restaurant. The entrepreneur is Birgitta Lundin, a young woman who started her own business as a renter in the beginning of the year 2002.

Fröjelgården was a tourist establishment already in the 1930's, when there was a first summer restaurant. Then in the 1940's the Swedish military was mobilised to this place and they built some new facilities. After the war, Fröjelgården was known as a resort for social holidays, mainly for single parents and children, who participated in different training programmes. The camp was the property of the Land Organisation and linked with the Social Democratic party. The main investment in the camp was made in 1978, when they built cabins, showers, sauna, open leisure house and conference room, which was opened for everyone.

Since 1993, the camp was owned by ABF, which also had links with the Social Democratic party. They lacked the resources to run it well. In 2001, they proposed to sell the camp, but Birgitta Lundin, as their former employee, persuaded them to rent this place to her.

Now she manages the camp, with a capacity of 126 beds, conference room, showers, 2 saunas and the restaurant. The camp offers also sport facilities including mini golf, badminton, volleyball, and a special game Kubbspel which was invented on Gotland. Birgitta is trying to be flexible with her business : besides accommodation and food, she also organises bus trips, adventure trips, and provides connections with boats to the Karlsö islands.

During the high season, Birgitta employs four people. She estimates that she has received between 1000 and 1500 visitors in this first year. The tourists are mainly from Sweden (Stockholm), and also from other countries like Germany, USA, etc.

Due to the history of the camp, there is not much connection or collaboration with other local people. Birgitta is now trying to create friendly relationships with local people and to collaborate with other entrepreneurs. She already works with the farmers, fisherman, ferries, etc, for example buying local vegetables. The Gotland largest travel agency is selling her tourist product at certain times of the year, but otherwise her marketing is mainly through a Website.

Her future plan is to extend the capacity of the camp, to build washing facilities (showers, toilets, washing machines) which will be available also to people staying on the adjoining campsite. She wants to extend the restaurant and gain a licence for a pub. At the moment she is struggling with the regulations related to gaining this licence, and thinks that it will take some time to get it. She intends to do more marketing, in addition to the Website. She is going to focus on group markets, such as confirmation groups, sport groups, schools, handicapped people etc). She has already made contact with an Association of Handicapped People.

2.5 Härkon Onsiö - Veterinary and Politician

Originally an economist, Härkon started his career in veterinary practice in 1978 and moved to Gotland in the late 1980s. He and his wife bought a farm and converted some outbuildings into a surgery, which is well equipped and provides the only vet practice where horses can be kept overnight.

He says 'We are put on earth to heal animals', and he is committed to healing the animals of local residents and of visitors to the island. He wishes to make the island more viable in the future.

He currently employs 3 vets, all from outside Gotland; and 3 administrative assistants, who are all from the island. His fees are less than they would be on the mainland. This makes his surgery attractive to visitors from the mainland, many of whom bring their animals to him for their annual check-up while they are on holiday.

In addition to the practice, Härkon has land on which he keeps about a dozen cattle and 80-90 sheep. He also makes hay. He confirmed that the number of farms has declined and that land is being sold to existing farmers. Farm diversification has occurred a little in Gotland but Härkon believes there is more capacity, for example through the provision by farmers of sites for mobile homes. The problem is that the Swedish tradition of Allemansrätten means that mobile homes tend to be dotted all along the coast and landowners are required to maintain the land in a clean state.

Härkon is also involved in some other activities :

- He has made a reality television series where his treatment of animals is filmed. At the same time the landscape of Fröjel is given a high profile and promoted
- He bought some old property in Hemse and converted it into 24 flats to rent to local young people. He also has business units and accommodation units to rent in Visby. In the future he hopes to bring some apartments from the winter olympics village in Norway and rebuild them in Klintehamn. He likes to use local suppliers wherever possible : though this is sometimes more expensive than using outside suppliers, he believes that it secures a better service.
- He helped to found the Hemse Ice hockey team, which is a 'motor' for winter activity.

Härkon's interest in the future of Gotland has led him into politics and he expects to become a Councillor. He sees the need to increase the number of people in Gotland in order to improve the social mix. His entrepreneurial spirit has led to projects that he believes would not have happened without outsiders, because Gotland people seem content with the status quo. He would also like to see an increase in the number of tourists, and believes there must be an increase in the wealth of the island to ensure that the high-quality goods and services demanded by tourists are also affordable by local people. This will ensure that businesses can be viable by attracting year-round trade.

2.6. Fröjel Travel Bureau – Lars Högdal

The Fröjel Travel Bureau is one of the most successful businesses on Gotland, with a turnover of 1.6 million Euro in 2001. Already in 2002, they have a turnover of 420.000 Euros. Lars Högdal – the owner and the managing director of the company – bought in 1992 a bankrupt travel agency, which was also dealing with renting houses and flats for a Trade Union. Five years later he bought another travel agency, in order to expand his business. He and his wife have got an agency also in Visby.

The Bureau is based on his family's farm, in buildings formerly used as stables for sheep, pigs and bulls.

The Bureau's main business is to handle the rental bookings for 250 privately owned houses, and selling ferry-tickets for visitors to Gotland. Clients for the rental bookings are mainly Swedish people from the mainland. The season is very short, from the beginning of June until mid July : there is very little trade in the rest of the year. Although the season is very short, Lars does not want to make it longer. Of the rental income, Lars pays 65% to the owners of the houses, and retains 35% to cover his costs plus tax.

The Bureau sells ferry tickets to the value of about 450.000 Euro a year, which is the 2nd best selling rate after the military. The ferry company is the Bureau's 2nd most important client.

In addition, Lars and his wife begin almost every year a new project. First in 1996 they bought the guesthouse Gula Hönan, which was established by the Czech consul Cramer in 1820. Inside the guesthouse can be found traditional hand-made furniture, paintings in the ceilings. Onto the adjoining site, Lars moved buildings rescued from a site elsewhere on the island and renovated these as 12 family apartments. The project – which offers a total of 160 beds – was highly remunerative since all the invested money came back after the first year.

Next he made a deal with the Aqua-Park of Kneippbyn, near Visby. He rented for 10 years a piece of sloping land overlooking the Aqua-Park and the sea, and constructed wooden apartments on different levels so that all could have a view of the sea. The project will be as profitable within 4 years. This good result comes from renovating the bought apartments at low cost, from 220 to 400 Euros per m². He does not use EU money to finance his business.

A unique project of the agency is the island Gotska Sandön, which is a National Park, situated 2.5 hours north from Fårösund by ferry. Lars concluded an agreement with the National Park authority for 4 years to manage the renting of the cabins on the island, which have a total capacity of 175 people. The cabins are of basic standard and are not equipped with bathroom or toilets, and the island has no shops or

restaurants. However, the cabins are fully booked for months ahead, for a long season.

The Bureau markets its establishments through brochures (printed in 50,000 copies per year) and Gotland's guides. Also, the company advertises from the 1st of January till the end of March weekly in the three biggest newspapers in Sweden. The Bureau has its own Website, at the moment only in the Swedish language : this Website is of increasing importance in the marketing, and Lars expects to reduce the amount of printed material. By the end of March already 60% of the beds are sold for the forthcoming summer.

Lars Högdal's philosophy is 'Value for money'. All services are included in the price. The guest should get every time something for his money, and something which he does not expect at all.

The Bureau is run by Lars and his wife. They have a staff of four local women : of these, one works round the year, the others work a variable number of months between January and September. Each member of staff has her own clear area of responsibility. Lars believes in valuing his staff, for example by taking them on holiday weekends together and taking them to tourism meetings where other entrepreneurs tend to go without their staff. He believes that they appreciate this, and that the cost is a good investment - 'What you give, you get back two-fold'. Nowadays he is working on a project to keep his staff also in the wintertime, through use of information technology.

3. The group's reflections on the tour

3.1 Impacts.

The apparent impacts of tourism on the parish are as follows :

Economic impacts. Seasonal employment is created, especially for local young people, and there is some limited year-round employment
Purchasing – the tourism entrepreneurs use local suppliers and contractors where they can

The Tourist Bureau (see case study 2.6) employs 6 people (3 year-round, 3 seasonal) and brings trade to the rentable units and the vet.

However, money leaks out of the parish at the Discovery Centre because visitors live outside the area, at Klintehamn, even though appropriate food and accommodation is available in Fröjel.

Environmental Impacts. There is a good deal of litter, in places where cars park behind the coast. The tourism accommodation sites are discreetly located and well maintained. The crayfish entrepreneur (see case study 2.3) has transformed what must have been a rather dull site around old clay-pits into a rich landscape, with a series of ponds and landscaped mounds : he is using the land in a versatile way, for example using his own wood for timber, charcoal and wood-chip heating. The horse farm (case study 2.2) is rather run down, and has a major 'wasting asset' in the collection of horse carriages and related equipment, which is being allowed to deteriorate unseen.

Synergy Effects. There is good linkage between tourism and land uses, particularly in the horse farm and the crayfish enterprise - see case studies 2.2 and 2.3.

3.2 Networking and co-operation

Härje Hallgren (the crayfish entrepreneur) advertises Gannarve (the horse farm) on his premises, and there are some indirect synergies between tourist accommodation and the ferry to the islands.

There is also an informal network between all the accommodation premises from Klintehamn to Petevik, who may forward their tourists on to neighbouring premises when full.

Many of the entrepreneurs are members of the local history group (Hembygdsföringen), which created the café and museum associated with the Viking harbour.

One of the entrepreneurs was a member of the Gotland Tourist Association : others found it inefficient and unhelpful.

Two of the entrepreneurs expressed strong views about the lack of communal initiative within the local community. Their view was that nothing would happen without leadership by active individuals, and that the community would be dragged along in this way. These two entrepreneurs were both outsiders, but were married to Gotlanders.

3.3 Support from the public sector

European Funding - there was a general feeling that available funds were inflexible and it was often more trouble than it was worth applying for EU funding. However, LEADER + is interpreted more flexibly than in England e.g. the time of volunteers may be used as match funding, and projects involving under 16-year olds are eligible.

The Swedish Government has given grants of 10% of the capital cost of creating crayfish ponds and new chalets for tourists.

Gotland Municipality – the planning controls, hygiene regulations and licencing system were seen to restrict new business and enterprise. The strategies for tourism and rural development appear to be ineffective.

3.4 The Future for Tourism

Most of the entrepreneurs have plans to expand in the future, in order to meet what they see as a growing demand for active tourism products. One felt that the land-based features, such as wildlife and the burial ship, should be better exploited for tourism; that there was scope for the number of active livestock farmers to increase from the one now existing to say five in the parish; and that the sporadic camping on the island should be replaced by properly managed camp sites which could bring income to farmers.

Some feel there should be more people both visiting and living on the island to make the place more viable, while others felt the balance between the number of tourists and the capacity of the island was already about right.

The summer camp would like to expand by creating a pub and providing washing facilities for caravans and campers.

The crayfish entrepreneur intends to complete the landscaping of his site, and to convert a barn for crayfish banquets and conference facilities.

3.5 Conclusion

There is a big potential for further ecotourism in the area, linked to wildlife and the historic sites.

The quality of the landscape could be exploited, making good use of artists and photographers.

The work of the local history group, related to the Fröjel Discovery programme, shows the value of having a local development group.

The collection of horse carriages and related equipment should if possible be maintained and used as a tourist attraction.

There is need to extend the very short tourism season, and generally for improved marketing.

There is potential for greater synergies between enterprises, for example by improved links with local food producers and craftspeople.

There is need for greater speed and flexibility in the exercise, by public bodies, of planning controls, hygiene regulations and licencing systems.

There is limited potential for replicating the enterprises in this parish, because the archaeological site is unique, crayfish farming requires the right soil conditions, and the tourist bureau is one of only two on the island. The enterprises based on tourism accommodation and on horse-riding might be replicated, if they could cope with the short season.

4. Reflections on the process of the study tour.

We enjoyed it very much. It was good to concentrate on one parish, and to meet a variety of people. Fröjel is exceptionally rich in entrepreneurs : three of those whom we met had substantial interests outside the parish. It might not be possible to arrange so rich a set of interviews in any other single parish.

We would have benefited from a talk with a municipal representative, bearing in mind the strong comments that our interviewees made about the planning and regulatory systems.

As to timing, we had the time we needed to prepare the report and presentation, by dint of hard work in the evenings and the use of two laptop computers. It would have helped to have access to a printer.

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