

A unique peek into yesteryear at Havrå

By Aasa Christine Stoltz

HAVRÅ – Clinging to the side of a steep mountain by a picturesque west coast Norwegian fjord, a petite farmyard cluster stands as a breathing testimony of life several hundred years ago. Dating back to the Bronze Age, the unique cultural treasure of Havråtunet is one of the last and best-preserved common farm clusters in western Norway – and a hidden gem well worth a visit. “This place is a time machine,” says branch manager Marit Adelsten Jensen. And she’s right. Walking the narrow cobbled paths between majestic mountains, peering into tiny old houses and barns, you feel not only miles but centuries away from the buzzing lives most of us normally lead.

Havråtunet, one of the last self-sufficient west coast farm clusters, exploits nature without abusing it. Age-old traditions, farming operations, building practices and work skills are still alive here as part of the farm’s heritage – the knowledge handed down by ancestors through the centuries.

Life here is a glimpse into the past, a peek at the farm life of days gone by.

Unique national treasure

Havrå was the first cultural environment protected under the Norwegian Cultural Heritage Act in 1998 and, according to Jensen, is home to the oldest building in Norway – a food store that dates back to 1116.

“Modern times never arrived at Havrå,” says Jensen, adding that the farm was not accessible by road until 1965. “Our core mission is to make sure we can pass on the necessary knowledge to continue to operate the farm in the way it has been operated for 1500 years – the same way in which we operate it today,” she says. “I am filled with humility and respect for the work that has been put into this place. People have been walking these trails for 3500-4000 years,” says Jensen. “You may imagine yourself in the 18th century – or the Middle Ages – or in 500 AD,” she adds, describing what a visit here may feel like.

In a bid to protect cultural heritage, Havrå aims to preserve this particular type of farmoperation, which was typical for much

of Western Norway as well as other parts of the country, before industrialisation changed it. The idea is to make sure this unique national treasure, part of a museum chain in Western Norway, will be a historical reference and source of knowledge for future generations.

The skills and knowledge that exist at Havrå, as well as breeds of livestock and certain types of crops and fauna, function as a “gene bank”, says Jensen. The production of food on modern farms is energy-intensive and should there be, for instance, a shortage of food or fossil fuels, the production of grain on steep terrain may become necessary. The type of grain and the knowhow to cultivate this exists at Havrå.

Employees master traditional farming methods such as harvesting and threshing the wheat without the benefit of modern machinery. Antique farming equipment is used daily, and is engineered by hand on site. Cows and sheep are slaughtered, and foods such as blood sausages and sheep’s head, a Norwegian delicacy, are produced on the farm.

Preparing the hay for threshing the old way



HAVRÅTUNET

OPENING HOURS:

Sundays 12.00-15.00. Guided tours at 12.00 and 13.30 (open from first Sunday in June until last Sunday in September)
Tuesdays and Wednesdays during school holidays 12.00-15.00 (June 22 – August 20)
Visits outside regular opening hours and group visits by arrangement all year

DIRECTIONS:

Havrå is located on the south side of the island of Osterøy, about a 30 minute drive from Bergen city centre. Cross Osterøybrua, turn right, then right again towards Bruvik. You will find Havrå on the left hand side after about 3 km.

Read more at

<http://www.muho.no/en/havråtunet/>

Everyday life at Havrå

The summer months are ideal for a visit. Local guides offer historical tours and you can witness the harvesting of hay, corn and potatoes. But most importantly, you will have the opportunity to observe the staff go about their daily business or see the animals grazing.

“It is everyday life that is interesting here,” says Jensen, encouraging people to visit during the week, when life is at its most authentic. The many nature trails, some also dating back centuries, are worth the walk. The terrain can be steep and is not for the faint-hearted, but the breath-taking views and mountain-fresh air make the trip worthwhile!

“We are a source of knowledge in learning-by-doing,” Jensen says, hoping that the next generation will pass on the knowledge from this serene little corner of the world.

“Our mission is to give this place eternal life.”

Narrow cobbled paths where people have walked for centuries

Some of the activities throughout the year at Havrå:

January-March:

Tool repair, attending to farm animals.

March-May:

Fertilizing, plowing, harrowing and sowing. Muck spreading. Planting potatoes, sowing corn.

May-August: Explore the beautiful nature trails. Easiest route: From Havrå to Blom on an old cart track. Alternatively follow the steps from the yard up “Stølagongen” to follow the old trail formerly used to go milk the cows. Ask the locals for advice.

May-June: Repairing of hayracks.

June-July: Harvesting of wheat. August-September: Harvesting of corn and potatoes.

September-October:

Slaughtering animals, bringing cows in from months-long grazing.

October-November: Threshing.