

# Fishermen´s chapels along Jungfrukusten – The Maiden Coast – a more than 400 year long story.

Along the coast of Gävleborg´s county there are eleven well maintained fishermen´s chapels, two in Gästrikland and nine in Hälsingland. The chapels are of different age and were established in different ways, but together they can tell much about the thrilling history of Jungfrukusten ever since the beginning of the seventeenth century...

So what is a fishing chapel? Well, it is a building built of wood by fishermen in a fishing village to be used for sermons and meetings during the summer season, when the distances to the usual churches were too far. But the chapel had also other functions. When autumn came the fishing tools were stowed away in the building and the chapel turned into storage for net and fishing equipment during the winter.

But to travel and fish along the coast has older traditions than from the seventeenth century. Already during the medieval period fishermen from the region around Mälaren, the large lake west of Stockholm, fished along the coast of Norrland. Gävle, as the first town in Norrland, was founded in 1446. In 1557 the fishermen of Gävle were given exclusive rights to fish along the long coast of south and middle Norrland roughly 500 km. 87 fishing villages known as “Gävlebohamnar” were built where fishermen during the summer half year could live and fish.



*The chapel in Prästgrundet. Photo: The County Museum, Gävleborg*



*The chapel and fishing village in Kråkö. Photo: The County Museum, Gävleborg*

Along the coast of Gästrikland and Hälsingland are traces of at least three chapel sites where chapels no longer are to be seen. Moreover most of the existing chapels have had older predecessors. Well known burial grounds are also found here. Many fishermen were later living during the winter in the towns of Söderhamn and Hudiksvall, but the fishermen from Gävle continued to fish and live in the fishing villages during summertime until the 2000 century.

The fishing chapels are often situated on a hill, usually at a small distance from the fishing village. Many of them have also functioned as navigation mark. The chapels are usually recognized by the high bell tower which often is built together with the chapel and window shutters that are closed during winter. Many have also high iron spires with weathercocks on the roof. The chapels' interior looks like a normal church room, but is in a smaller scale. Here you will find benches with aisle, altar, altar rings and a pulpit and often even a small organ. There is also a reader's chair where especially appointed fishermen read the texts when the priest was absent.

We are now going to have a quick survey over the chapels along the coast starting from the north: Bergön - due to the land elevation no longer an island and therefor easily reached by car - has a chapel built with logs cut down 1636. This is newly ascertained with help of an annual ring dating. The same is also true for the next chapel to the south. On Bålsön near the old harbor you will find the oldest known chapel along the coast of Norrland, erected 1604 with interior paintings from the end of the 1800 century. On the northern part of the peninsula Hornslandet is the fishing village Kuggörarna with a chapel from 1778 with a sea view on three sides. The two youngest chapels along Jungfrukusten are also found in this region. Hölick's fishing village on the southernmost end of Hornslandet has a red painted large chapel consecrated 1930. On the island of Olmen is the youngest chapel in the county, finished as late as 1956, but both these chapels have been built in the same tradition as the older ones.

The well-known priest Johan Olov Broman ordered a chapel on Kräkön 1736 and this nowadays yellow painted chapel is still on the same place. Out east there is the large island Agön with its chapel built 1660 and enlarged during the 1830th.



Interior of the chapel in Lövgrund.  
Photo: The County Museum, Gävleborg

The city of Söderhamn was founded 1620. In the archipelago of Söderhamn is the fishing village Prästgrundet with the smallest chapel of all consecrated 1830. Storjungfrun - The Large Maid, which is the island that gave the coast the name Jungfrukusten - has a chapel built with timber cut down 1617 and 1618. Just north of the city of Gävle and easily reached by car, you will find Bönan with its large white painted chapel from 1843. On the Island Lövgrund is a very well kept white chapel from 1832.

It is worth to note that even though the chapels are of age they are in a high degree living church rooms and places for weddings, christening and other gatherings in the fishing villages. They are still important meeting places engaging many and kept by those who during the summer season live in the vicinity of the chapels. They have above all much to tell about the lifes of fishermen and are in that way important part of the story of Jungfrukusten. Take the opportunity to experience and discover these thrilling environments you too!

*Daniel Olsson, building antiquary,  
the County Museum, Gävleborg.*

**Slut på broschyrer?  
Kontakta oss för påfyllning!**

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# Visit the sites of ancient cult along Jungfrukusten



The church in Hög  
Photo: The County Museum in Gävleborg

Along the coast of Gävleborg there are many interesting places to visit. Some sites of cultural interest run the risk of being forgotten although they have a fascinating story to tell! During the last years the County Museum of Gävleborg together with the coastal regions of Estonia and Latvia has been working to enhance interest for the ancient sacred sites along the coast of the Baltic. Hundreds of sites have been registered and mapped and are now to be read about on the newly started website [www.ancientsites.eu](http://www.ancientsites.eu).

*"Since time immemorial human beings have been attracted to that mysterious and unknown. Ancient sacred sites are wrapped up into myths and legends provoking our curiosity, they give us a chance to get a glimpse into our past. Tales and written records have survived until nowadays telling us about rituals held at ancient sacred sites, for example, offerings, worshiping the nature in accordance with the annual course of the Sun, cult of the fire and the dead. Our ancestors believed that trees, stones, groves, forests, hillocks, and water are graced by miraculous powers that can help treating diseases, protect against misfortune, as well as insure health and fertility. Nowadays, a natural sacred site can look as an ordinary stone or a hill at first sight, still the tales and legends passed over from generation to generation herald something else. It is breathtaking evidence about our ancestors' long history and their perceiving of the powers of the nature, relationship between the man and the gods."*  
([www.ancientsites.eu](http://www.ancientsites.eu))

Information boards with history of the sites are being placed at five selected places in Gävleborg:

## **A** Lervik's spring

The Lervik's spring just north of Gävle is an ancient mineral spring. During centuries people have come to drink of the health giving water. It is also a Trinity spring where people gathered to drink during the Night of Trinity. Lervik's spring is dried out during periods, but suddenly when you lift the lid it might be filled to the brim.

## **B** The burial mound of stones at Klapern

On Klapern in Norrala there are large burial mounds of stone from the Bronze Age. The huge graves of cobblestone make a suggestive environment in the open pine forest. We do not know exactly how

old these graves are, but mound graves were first built around 1500 years B.C. in Scandinavia.

## **C** Funeral spheres and grand mounds in Hög

The church in Hög was built 1191-1192 and around the church you will find old graves, so called grand mounds from the centuries A.D. Beside and in the walls of the church are "funeral spheres" i.e. round stones with crosses which from the beginning were lying in the graves from the Iron Age, but have later been immured in the church's walls. During archeological excavations in the area around the church a thing site from the Viking Age has been found quite near one of the grand mounds.

## **D** The labyrinth on Kuggörarna

The labyrinth on Kuggörarna is beautifully situated on the very north of the island. It is believed that labyrinths were used for different ceremonies. The most common explanation regarding the labyrinths on our coast is that they were meant to catch the storms. Common to the labyrinths is that they are connected to the sea and seafarers. We do not know how old the labyrinths around the Baltic are. Some are from the Middle Ages some may be from the Viking Ages.

## **E** The Iron Age cairns in Mellanfjärden

The cairns along the shore north of Mellanfjärden are 2000 years old and were built during the early Iron Age. At that time the people had started to produce and use iron in our region. Graves from prehistoric time are not only burial grounds but also sites for rituals of different art. It may be so that the cairn itself was a grand burial gift to the dead. The mounds are placed so that they are easily seen from the sea, like a navigation mark.

## How do you find the ancient sacred sites?

See the map page 2-3. A folder with information about these and other ancient sites in the county you will find in tourist bureaus and the County Museum.



Information board at the labyrinth on Kuggörarna  
Photo: The County Museum in Gävleborg