

Experience 17-century Sweden



Welcome to the old farm Sporrakulla – in the deep forests of southern Sweden

The grey timber walls of the buildings have never been painted and seems to blend into the surrounding pastures. The farm has seen centuries pass and as you step into the courtyard, it is easy to imagine that you have travelled in time. This part of Skåne is called Göinge and it is an area with a lot of history. Many sites commemorate the bad times when this area was tormented by the wars between Sweden and Denmark, but you can also find traces of the peaceful fight for survival in an environment where the forests, the lakes and the mountains were both obstacles and resources that gave the inhabitants their income.

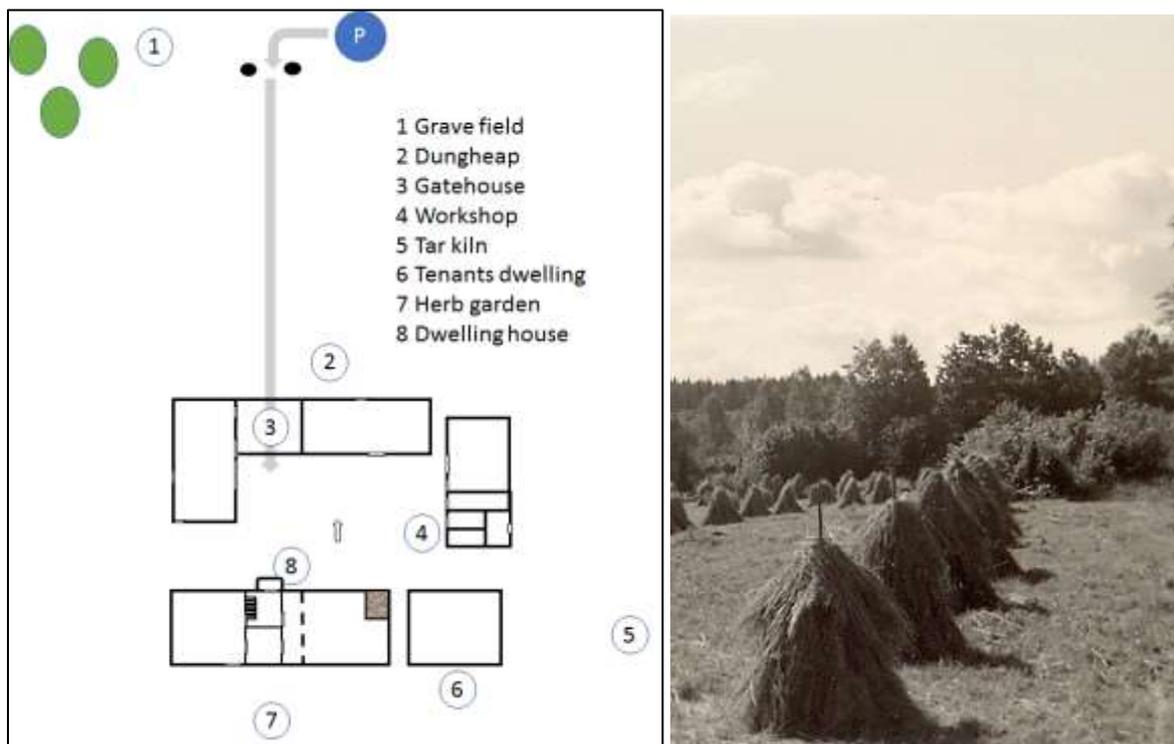
1 The Grave field Sporrakullas oldest history

Sporrakulla is situated in a forest called "Kullaskogen" (The hilly forest). This is a vast forest of 1 200 hectares and the farm is built on top of one of the steep hills in the area. The buildings are unusually well-preserved and give us an opportunity to experience what a farm in this area looked like in the old days. It was built in a remote area and was in many ways a self-sustaining unit. Except Sporrakulla there were three similar farms in Kullaskogen. These farms were never separated by distinct boundaries. Instead the forest was as common area where the animals could graze and the

inhabitants could get firewood and timber. You can still see traces of the cultivated fields close to the farm. Further away there were hayfields and winter food for the animals were also gathered by pollarding the trees.

Though remote, the area has been populated for a very long time. There is a grave field with a couple of distinct humps in the pasture close to the farm. The people of the farm buried their dead here until Christianity reached the area about 1 000 years ago. These grave fields are usually situated close to a farm. Close enough for the forefathers to watch over their descendants.

For centuries, the district of Göinge was a wooded, almost impassable border area between Denmark and Sweden. It was scarcely populated and the parish north of Sporrakulla is still called “Örkened”, a name derived from the Scandinavian word “örken”, meaning desert. The area became a part of Denmark during the Middle Ages. This process was initiated in cooperation between the Danish king and the Catholic Church who both wanted to secure the valuable natural resources of Göinge: iron, timber and tar. Denmark was then a local superpower with a large fleet and there were mighty archbishops residing in Lund, challenging the king’s authority. The oldest written source that mentions the farm is the taxations records from 1584. It was then farmed by the tenant Böre Mogensön.



2 The dungheap

“The meadow is the mother of the field”

Even though the ground in this area is filled with stones it was possible to turn some areas into crop fields. But if the farmer had no means to fertilise the soil it soon became degraded through loss of nutrients. This problem was solved during centuries by clearing enormous areas for farming. Every

field could only be used for a few years and then it was left as a fallow field until it had regained its nutrients.

About a 1 000 years ago, the climate turned colder and it became necessary for the farmers to build stables for their livestock. Outside the stables all the dung that the animals produced during the winter was gathered. According to an old Swedish proverb “the meadow is the mother of the field”. In the old days, it was the amount of hay from the meadows that determined the wealth of the farmer, since it made it possible to feed the animals through the winter. More hay meant more dung, and this could be used to fertilise the croplands. This would, in turn, give a good harvest. For many people today, it is important to have a nice car on the driveway and the latest technical gadgets to show of your wealth. In the old days, it was the dungheap that symbolised the farms wealth and it was hence placed in front of the farm!

The meadows close to Sporrakulla could not provide enough hay so there were additional meadows far away. On these meadows, the hay was dried and gathered in haybarns until winter. It could then easier be transported to the farm on a horse-drawn sleigh.

According to the taxations records the farmers grew rye and barley. The harvest was threshed in the barn and then the grain was carried in sacks up stairs to the second floor of the dwelling house for dry storage. On this farm, they also cultivated hops. This was compulsory in Sweden until 1860.

3 The gatehouse

When this was a war-torn country

Though peaceful today, Sporrakulla is often associated with the wars in the 1700-century. Göinge was then a borderland between Denmark and Sweden and the locals who joined the guerrilla supporting the Danish side where by the Swedish authorities considered as traitors. They were often called “snapphanar”, a derogatory name borrowed from the German language. In 1676, Denmark made an attempt to re-conquer Skåne that had been lost to Sweden in 1658. Many inhabitants in the district of Göinge had become impoverished since they became Swedish subjects. Therefore, the more daring chosed to join the Danish army. But according to the Swedish authorities, this was treason, since the population of Skåne had sworn obedience to the Swedish king.

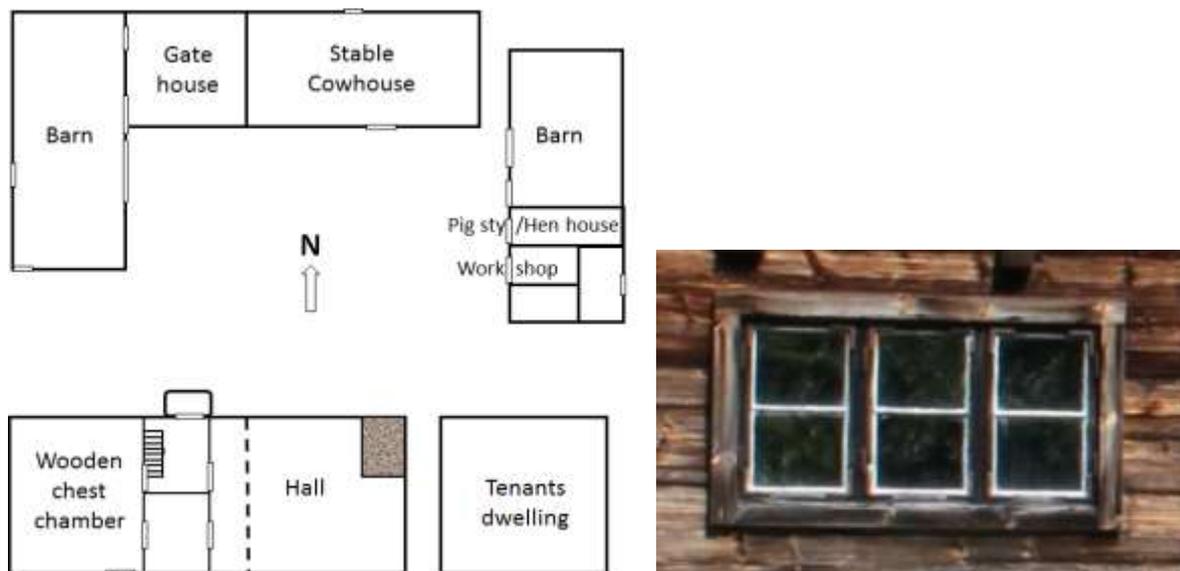
At least on one occasion there were rebels visiting this farm. The tenant in 1658, Bendt Oredsen, was prosecuted for protecting and providing for Snapphanar in his house. The sources do not tell if Bendt was punished. But if he was, the punishment was not hard since he remained as tenant on the farm into the 1680s.

Sporrakulla is often presented as the only farm in the parish that was spared when the Swedish King Charles IX gave his infamous order to burn every farm in the parish of Örkened to the ground. This is an old misconception since Sporrakulla is not situated in Örkened but in the parish of Glimåkra. Despite this, there is an old legend telling about how the inhabitants of Sporrakulla saved their farm by setting up a large bonfire in front of the farm. The Swedish soldiers who came to burn down the farm, saw the flames and concluded that another patrol had already been up there and passed by.

4 The workshop

The current buildings

Sporrakulla became famous as an historic farm following a historic movie about the war-torn Göinge in the 1700-century, partly recorded at the farm in 1941. The farm still lets us understand what life was like back then. By dendrochronology, the technique of dating timber by studying the annual rings in wood, it has been concluded that the dwelling house is the oldest building and that it was built 1801-1805. Even though the buildings have been replaced during the ages they still give us a rare opportunity to experience the 1700-century, because the newer buildings likely have been erected in the same way as the previous ones.

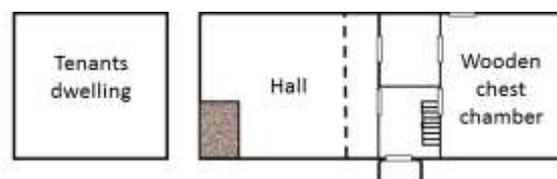


The dwelling house is a log house with notched corners and was originally built in three sections. In the middle section, there was a one-story hall and in both ends there were sections with two stories. This type of dwelling houses was once common in the forest area between Denmark and Sweden and in Swedish they are called "Högloftshus". The two-story section to the east were torn down in the late 1800 and replaced with a then more up to date, red painted building that we can see here today.

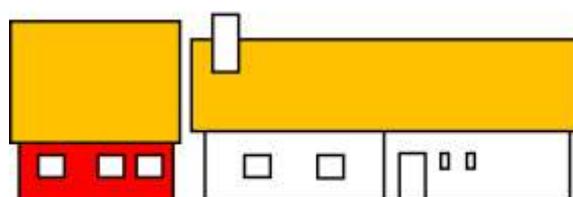
The west barn is built with a threshing floor where the sheaves were beaten with the grain flail. The threshed mixture of chaff and grain was then winnowed by tossing it into the air with a shovel, letting the wind blow away the chaff.

The north barn consists of the gatehouse and the stables. In 1840, this was the home of two horses, one ox, two cows and their calves.

The east barn has another threshing floor, a sty for the pigs, a hen house, a workshop and a woodshed. An earlier version of this barn was built about a meter closer to the centre of the courtyard, and the foundation of this building can still be seen.



Ca 1942



5 The tar kiln

The valuable forest

Until the Swedish conquest in 1658, Skåne was a part of Denmark and until then, the farmers use of the forest were almost unregulated. They could chop down trees for timber and hunt. Hunting was actually reserved for the nobility, but this far from Copenhagen, the Danish authorities control was almost non-existing. The new Swedish authorities however immediately took a firm grip of their new land. The new Forest Act that came into force 1664 prescribed a total ban on the felling of oak and beech. All oaks in the kingdom were stated as the King's possessions, since they were needed for building warships. The beeches were also considered valuable as the beechnuts along with the oaks acorns was needed for the production of acorn-finished pork. Pigs that were fed on acorn and beechnuts gave pork that was a highly-demanded delicacy. Today the Spanish ham "pata negra", produced by black Iberian pigs fed on acorns, is famous and by some considered as the finest pork in the world. There was no spruce forest around Sporrakulla in the 1700-century. The forest was made up mostly of oak, beech and some pine. According to the taxations records from 1671 there was enough forest to provide for 10 pigs. The three other farms in Kullaskogen: Trollakulla, Dalshult and Broddakulla managed to provide for 200 pigs.

Another valuable product from the forest was tar that was produced in a permanent kiln. It is cut into a slope about 50 meters east of the farms dwelling house. The kiln was filled with finely chopped pine stumps and logs containing a lot of resin. The kiln was then covered with earth and a fire was started at the top. The fire burned slowly down the hill and the heat caused the tar to flow down-hill where it was collected in a barrel. The kiln burned night and day and the workers slept in a small hut close by. There were also charcoal kilns in the forest. In these, wood was turned into charcoal that could be sold for instance to blacksmiths. In the mid-1800s the tenant Sven Persson annually payed 100 Riksdaler in cash, but still had to work unpaid for the landowner for ten days and deliver 8,5 kilograms of butter, 15 barrels of charcoal, 94 litres of tar and a capercaillie!



6 The tenants dwelling

Life was hard for a poor farmer

Usually the parents stayed on the farm when a son took over as the new tenant. But to ensure the parents livelihood, the son had to sign a very detailed contract, before he was allowed to take up his position as tenant. When Sven Persson and his wife Elna Bengtsdotter took over in 1837, a chamber in the eastern part of the building was reserved for his parents Pehr and Kjersti. They would every day receive firewood and water. They were guaranteed access to the baking oven in the hall and their animal would be cared for in the stable. They were ensured certain quantities of barley, rye,

malt, flaxseed and potatoes as food and the fruit from three apple trees and one pear tree in the garden. In total, it was a considerable part of the farm's production, that were reserved for the old couple for the rest of their lives.

Sven tried to make ends meet by trading but he did not make it. In 1840 he went bankrupt with an astounding 877 Riksdaler in debt. In August the same year, an auction was held at Sporrakulla farm and everything the family owned was sold: The livestock, their tools, furniture and even the growing crop on the fields. Svens wife Elna took their young son and fled to her parents' home. Sven was no longer a respectable farmer but instead a poor, homeless man. The following years he survived on subsidies from the parish.

Sven Perssons younger brother Jöns, later called "Sporra Jösse", took over as tenant in 1852 with his wife Nilla Olsdotter. They got six children and could barely support their family. In 1881 they choose to leave everything and emigrate to America. To be a farmer in the 1880s was so hard that the following three years, the owner could not find a new willing tenant.

7 The herb garden

Food, medicine and much more

Without the garden and the orchard, you would barely have been able to survive on the farm. Herbs and vegetables of many kinds were grown. To cultivate, and not less important, to preserve all the different types of plants demanded great knowledge, usually provided by the women of the farm. A lot of things could be grown for food, while other plants was a natural pharmacy.

Honeysuckle (*Lonicera caprifolium*) was used to treat asthma, as a laxative or for diuretic use.

Caraway (*Carum carvi*) has been used to improve digestion since the stoneage. In the 17th century, caraway brandy was ordained to treat migraine. Another useful medical herb is **lovage** (*Levisticum officinale*), that alleviates pain, stop plague and promotes love. It is also spicy and could be used instead of broth. **Peony flowers** (*Paeonia officinalis*) was considered beneficial to the liver and also as a remedy for muscle spasms. Peony could also be used to lessening the pains of childbirth.



Except medicine, herbs could be used for a lot of other purposes. **Sage** (*Salvia officinalis*) and **wormwood** (*Artemisia absinthium*) kept insects out of the linen cupboard, **gravel root** (*Eutrochium purpureum*) gave a rare red textile dye and **soapwort** (*Saponaria officinalis*) could be used as laundry detergent.

To preserve the food produced on the self-sustaining farm demanded great knowledge. There is a root cellar under the dwelling house where root vegetables, fruit and other types of food could be stored cold but kept from freezing. Sweet berries like blueberries could be used to make jam without adding sugar but sometimes honey was added to increase durability.



Drying was a very useful method of preservation. Herbs could be hanged upside down to dry in a well ventilated, dry, dark place like the attic. Vegetables, berries and fruit were dried in the baking oven.

8 The dwelling house

A farm doomed for demolition turned a tourist destination

The farm was cared for by tenants for more than three centuries. The last tenant, Carl Persson, lived at Sporrakulla from 1934 to 1964. During the 1940s there were a horse, three cows, a pig and fifteen chickens. The amount of cultivated fields were about ten acres. This could not sustain a family and therefore Carl Persson worked most of the year with logging. When he moved out in 1964 the farm was deemed unfit for agricultural use. The fields were difficult to plough and it was considered too expensive to get electricity and telephone to the farm. Instead, the owner Råbelöfs estate, decided to convert the farmland into forest and most of the farm was planted with spruce. But already in the tenancy contract from 1934, the owner of Råbelöfs estate Gilbert Kennedy, reserved the right to use the old dwelling house as a resting lodge during family outings. There must have been a notion that the farm was a unique building. The antiquarian authorities got involved in 1942 to “restore and improve” the cultural values. Larger windows were installed in the dwelling house, presumably to let in more light. Windows of original size were reinstalled in 2016.

The last private owners, Gilbert and later Douglas Kennedy of Råbelöf estate, were interested in the future preservation of the buildings and the sites accessibility for tourists. In 1974, the farm was declared a National Heritage building. Since 1975 the Municipality of Östra Göinge holds the tenancy and the local history society of Glimåkra takes care of the site. The owner of Sporrakulla, and the entire Kullaskogen, is since 1983 the foundation Skogssällskapet.



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