

## **Överhogdalsbonaderna Viking Tapestries – Europe's oldest pictorial tapestries at Jamtli Museum**

Among the most remarkable find from the Viking era in Sweden and Jämtland Härjedalen are the colourful tapestries found in the church of Överhogdal village in 1910. The textiles are the crown jewels of Jamtli Museum's collections and still a well-kept secret to most of the world. The Viking age tapestries are covered by figures of people, horses and wild animals, as well as legendary creatures. They hurry from right to left in rows, passing houses, churches and ships on their way.

There is no doubt that the motifs are a mix of both Norse and Christian beliefs and it was therefore no surprise when the woven tapestries were dated from between 800 to 1100 AD in a C14 test. They are a perfect testimony on how the Swedish Vikings lived in an era when Norse and Christian beliefs co-existed as they were made in a period of transition between the two faiths.

In 1910, the artist Paul Jonze toured Jämtland and Härjedalen on his bicycle, commissioned to make an inventory of items of rural culture by the Association for Jämtlands Handicrafts, the precursor of the County Museum. As he arrived in Överhogdal, he wanted to take a look in the three sheds by the church. The church had recently been restored, and one of the sheds was used to store old planks and all kinds of rubbish from the old church interior. Right inside the door laid a bundle of textiles, which Paul now took outside to have a closer look. As he saw the old-fashioned images, he decided to bring it back to Östersund. It was handed over to the County Governor's wife Ellen Widen, at the time a prominent figure within the regional cultural heritage movement. She promptly gave it a wash in the bath tub in the basement. The next year, an exhibition on church history was held in Östersund, and the Överhogdal tapestries were presented to the public for the first time.

Today, these unique items from the Swedish Viking era are exhibited at Jamtli Museum in Östersund – the county official museum, where a special room has been designed to make sure that they are preserved in optimal conditions.

### **Visit the Överhogdalsbonaderna**

Jamtli Museum is open Tuesdays – Sundays 11.00 – 17.00.

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During the World Championships there will be an extra guided tour of the Överhogdalsbonaderna  
Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March 11.00

### **Background - The Swedish Vikings**

Swedish Vikings were probably both merchants and in some cases robbers. Vikings gave name to the era in Sweden from the iron age around 800 AD til the battle of Hastings 1066 which marks the beginning of the medieval ages.

According to stories written by Swedish Viking author Snorre Sturlasson quite a few Norwegians fled their King Harald Hårfagre and came to settle in Sweden and Jämtland Härjedalen around the start of the Viking age. These Vikings enjoyed the warm period following with rich possibilities to cultivate the land together with the hunting and fishing possibilities in the area. And, they probably intermarried with the hunters, gatherers and farmers living in the area from before. Still today there are many names of villages in Jämtland Härjedalen reminding us of the Norse mythology these Swedish Vikings believed in.

