

Two Traditions in Norwegian Outdoor Life *Friluftsliv*

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More than one-half of the Norwegian population is today regularly involved in some form of *Friluftsliv*, according to recent investigations. Even when *Friluftsliv* is loosely defined the numbers are remarkable. One might add that it is not really so remarkable that Norwegians are active in *Friluftsliv* in such a wide, open, alpine country.

Friluftsliv has long been an active involvement in Norway. It is common to refer to a century of *Friluftsliv*. However, I will in this article discuss the larger perspective. My purpose is to highlight the aspects of *Friluftsliv* which were active long before anyone began speaking of *Friluftsliv* and long before the activities bore resemblance to its modern forms. It is primarily the essence of *Friluftsliv*, rather than the definitions or concepts, that I will focus on: the idea has existed long before anyone has named or defined it.

Norwegian *Friluftsliv* is broad-spectored and cannot be captured in simple phraseology. Several people have compared Norwegian *Friluftsliv* with the Mountain Birch tree: the same light, airy and simple traits characterize both. There is some truth to the comparison. The main currents in Norwegian *Friluftsliv* have developed in a different mode than the somber alpine and earthier sense suggest.

Another characteristic of Norwegian *Friluftsliv* is that it has had its major and minor prophets. The Norwegian playwright and poet, Henrik Ibsen, himself, wrote of *Friluftsliv* in 1859, in fact he is likely one of the first to use the phrase in a written text, even if the context is surprising. In the poem 'On the Mountain Plateau' he writes:

In the desolate summer chalet
All my rich catchings I collect;
There is a stool and the open hearth
Friluftsliv for my thoughts.

One might conclude that *Friluftsliv* encourages thought and is the initial conception of the concept. A mutual understanding of Norwegian *Friluftsliv* is that it involves body, feelings and thoughts.

Another major prophet of *Friluftsliv* is Fridtjof Nansen, the Norwegian explorer of Greenland, saw the larger perspectives. He saw that *Friluftsliv* was capable of saving an ailing culture and returning humans to a simple, natural life. In his much-quoted speech '*Friluftsliv*' from 1921 he makes clear:

What will provide us with compensations and bring us back to a more human existence is and will be the simple life in nature, forests, meadows and mountains, across the great plateaus, in the large loneliness, where completely new and grand ideas come to one and leave marks that are not quickly erased.

Nansen had several successors. One is Nils Faarlund, the Norwegian environmentalist, who in the 1970s repeatedly underscored that *Friluftsliv* must be seen in a holistic perspective. *Friluftsliv* is a goal in itself and must not only become a method which society can employ as it will. With this statement he confronts the 'recreation-thinking' which had come to characterize *Friluftsliv* after WWII. *Friluftsliv*, according to Faarlund, must not be a form of 'rehabilitation for our techno-culture nor an artificial respirator for a cultural form which is out of step with the inherited prerequisites of human beings and the ecological interaction on our planet Earth.' (*Friluftsliv. Hva-hvorfor-hvordan. [What-Why-How]*. Hemsedal 1974, p. 41.)

This commentary demonstrates how recent trends in Norwegian *Friluftsliv* are interposed with an increasingly environmental attitude and ecological consciousness, not easily imposed in an understanding of outdoor life which is both simple and unreflective. In addition to the *Friluftsliv*-prophets, the influential cultural elite have indirectly influenced these trends.

In a world where untouched nature is disappearing or is being destroyed it is clear that for Norwegian *Friluftsliv* to maintain its distinctive qualities for future generations a conscious determination to preserve traditional Norwegian *Friluftsliv* with an increased ecological awareness is adamantly necessary.

The simple, unreflective *Friluftsliv* is a thing of the past; let us rather find joy in the potential that increased ecological insight which will enrich *Friluftsliv* today.

What exactly is traditional Norwegian *Friluftsliv*?

Friluftsliv—the boundaries

One must begin with language to define *Friluftsliv*. What activities characterize the Norwegian tradition of *Friluftsliv*?

A	B
Walking in the woods and mountains	Hunting
Walking glaciers	Fishing
Climbing	Berrying
Paddling	Egg/mushroom gathering
Sailing	
Skiing	
Sledding	
Skating	
Motor-cross	River driving of logs
Competitive Orientering	

Listed on one side of the table are the luxury activities and on the other are the utilitarian activities, which support survival. Neither river driving of logs nor professional fishing can be classified as *Friluftsliv*.

B-activities can be termed *Friluftsliv* only when they are executed as secondary sources of income, where the joy of the activity is equally important or more important than the yield.

- b) Further there is a historical interest. In the 1800s city culture, clearly represented by English lords and Norwegian painters, poets and scientists discover nature and create a form of *Friluftsliv* grew and carried over into the 1900s. At the same time the more subtle, but not less strong tradition which was represented by the Norwegian mountain farmer hunting and fishing activities receded as a result of a new lifestyle focused on more centralization, specialization and less self-sufficiency. The mountain farmer was exploited by city culture in guiding city people as they took their first, fumbling steps into nature in the 1800s dressed in city clothes and with umbrellas and wool blankets to protect themselves from bad weather. One must not forget that the mountain farmer had roamed the mountains for centuries: hunting, fishing, gathering food and medicines. To contend, as often is done, that mountain nature had been discovered in the 1800s is therefore highly misleading. Mountain nature had been 'discovered' by city culture and 'captured' in cultural expressions such as painting, poetry and music. Folk art, on the other hand, had long been familiar with nature and allowed it to characterize ballads, stories, woven artefacts, wood carvings, folk music and folk poetry. It seems clear that hunting equipment is an equally good expression of relationships to nature as Edvard Grieg's music or Henrik Wergeland's poetry. Historically speaking then, it is important to preserve the relationship of the country village to *Friluftsliv*, relations which were ancient at the time the city culture employed *Friluftsliv* in the new 1800s trend.
- c) There is a strong academic interest and logic which underscores the determination to highlight rural *Friluftsliv*. All cultures are potentially able to relate to the natural world over and above the basic necessities of survival. In most cultures there exist also similar patterns of relationships even if not all members of the community have developed this kind of interaction. I will employ the concept "*Friluftsliv*" to indicate life in nature where the primary goal is neither subsistence nor community building and where secondary income is an addition to livelihood, but is not requisite. To contend that people have not previously defined *Friluftsliv* in this way is not a strong enough argument against the academic critique I have mentioned. It is important to realize that hunting, fishing, trading, berry and egg gathering, plant and herb gathering often serve as a good excuse to go for a walk outdoors; it is exactly the push that one often needs simply because it is relatively uncommon for people to go for a walk in the woods without having a purpose. City culture is quite different in that respect: to go for a walk in the woods without an objective is considered quite 'natural'. It is, in fact, the lack of purpose of the meandering or sailing that one seeks.

A puzzling development is occurring in the country villages that requires an explanation: the country folks' modern habit of sitting in village cafes instead of taking off for the woods. Is it possible that because society today [city culture with a focus on purposeless wandering as opposed to traditional rural culture with purposeful walking] has denied them the excuses they need to go walking that *Friluftsliv* in the country villages is dying away?

An important issue for the future is the question of the rural attitude to nature and if it is to be built up according to urban culture, i.e., through *Friluftsliv* activities in a specially constructed environment, or if it is possible to resuscitate the old skills and life styles connected to a diverse basis for subsistence. *Friluftsliv* in Norway would stand to gain substantially in the last instance.

City Friluftsliv

The original source of modern *Friluftsliv* is to be found in England, which experienced industrialization early. A concentration of people in the industrialized city culture created a need to be in the free outdoors. At the same time England had a leisured upper class with had time and money to enjoy the natural world. Very quickly 'sport' joined a lifestyle which already included books and libraries. People engaged in 'outdoor life' by walking, riding, hunting, fishing, climbing from the beginning of the 1800s. In short time English lords extended their 'playgrounds' to a number of European countries, including Norway. In that way salmon fishing as a sport, mountain rambling as an expedition of discovery and mountain climbing as a challenge were all introduced to Norway. English visitors such as Slingsby, Blackwell, Rathbone and others made a great impression particularly on the country folk.

Mountain farmers were trained as guides, thereby introducing an English form of *Friluftsliv* in the mountains. These mountain farmers chose to guide strange city folk up and around the mountains rather than hunt and fish for themselves. And strange were those English city folk with their heavy city clothes, umbrellas, wool blankets, women in long skirts pinned up with safety pins. It must have been a startling sight.

It is not completely correct to say that the English were solely responsible for this trend. Even before the English pleasure seekers arrived in Norway, Norwegian poets and painters began to explore the potential of Norwegian nature during the flowering of the national romantic period in Norway. Norwegian authors such as Wergeland, Vinje, Ibsen and Caspari have all influenced these traditions and have imprinted the nature of the mountains in the Norwegian people up to today. Norwegian painters such as Flintoe, I.C. Dahl, Tiedemann and Gude have probably had the same effect with their paintings.

In addition to painters and poets, scientists took to the Norwegian mountains even earlier. Norwegian botanists like Chr. Smith and Chr. Boeck and geologists such as B.M. Keilhau travelled extensively through the Norwegian mountains. Later in the 1800s tourist organizations seriously prepared the way for more newcomers to visit the mountains with the building of cabins and marking of paths.

At the same time skiing had begun a clear development. Sondre Nordheim, the so-called 'father of modern skiing' and others made advances in bindings, equipment and skiing techniques. Skiing as a sport was soon 'conquered' by city culture; skiing events and competitions become very popular.

I will not depict the development in detail; what has been mentioned here is representative only for mountain *Friluftsliv* as it was developed by city culture. The important point with regard to an analysis of Norwegian society is that the development of *Friluftsliv* in the 1800s was clearly based on the values and behaviour of city culture. The country villages possessed the knowledge and skills of the outdoor environment, but the city culture exploited that environment and called it its own. The rural players were best but the city players determined the rules and dealt the cards. It is not unnatural that these trends occur in a growing industrial society, which is integral to the city culture, but it is interesting that the city culture is victorious in the parameters of *Friluftsliv*.

Friluftsliv in the Country Village

When the English upper class took to nature in the 1800s, it was not a historically new phenomenon. What was new was the way it was formed as 'sport and outdoor life'. Rousseau had wished for a return to the simple life in nature. Before him the Greeks and the Romans cultivated shepherd romanticism and longed for the simple life in the country represented by the hunter, the herdsman or the small farmer.

Neither Rousseau or shepherd romanticism has had much influence on Norwegian culture. People in Norway have, on the other hand, from early times practiced life in nature, full time and part time. Soon after the last ice age hunters from the South and East made their way into the Norwegian mountains, living there on a full time basis. They came down to the coast when necessary, normally when they needed salt. Otherwise they followed the reindeer herds in the mountains all year long. Even if the average temperature at the time (6-8000 years ago) was 2.5 degrees C higher than today, it is evident that the life these people lived in nature was quite different than our modern mountain rambles. We have likely learned quite a bit about self sufficiency in nature from these many hunting and fishing communities.

To ask: 'Have these old societies been an inspiration to people today?' may be an irrelevant, modern day question. What is important is that those ancient peoples lived as they did for thousands of years and the knowledge, skills and practical insight has been passed on from generation to generation all the way up to today. It is obvious that they have been an inspiration to our time. Nansen sought values and skills from what he called simple, natural life and consciously attempted to employ those values as a remedy for modern, unhealthy living. Strangely enough, it seems that the traditional relationship that modern Norwegian society has to nature has been more significantly influenced by English *Friluftsliv* than by Norwegian *Friluftsliv*. Today, however, there are indications that groups within Norwegian *Friluftsliv* circles are consciously returning to and re-integrating the Norwegian tradition of *Friluftsliv* into their own *Friluftsliv*, where the small farmer and the diversity of the small farm as well as the hunting and fishing society define the ideal.

Agriculture developed in Norway from approximately the year 500 Our Time. Up until then hunters and fishers kept to the mountains and the coasts for more than 5000 years. It was the farmers who eventually settled in the valleys which were previously unexploited by hunters because the dense woodlands made the hunt more difficult. The Norwegian landscape changed drastically with the coming of agriculture, especially due to iron-ore mining and its devastation of wooded areas. Iron production resulted in more effective iron farm equipment and tools which further destroyed the natural environment. In time, farming superseded hunting and fishing which consequently were reduced to secondary sources of income for farmers. These activities came to be the role model for *Friluftsliv* where elements of 'the unnecessary extras' grew to define *Friluftsliv*. In this way hunting and fishing could become the goals: leisure activities, the enhancement of daily life. Several other areas have shown a similar pattern of development: from survival activity to free-time play and games. A number of sport skills have come into existence due to changing production means or methods through the liberation of necessary skills; they became luxury skills, such as jumping, running and throwing.

One aspect of the Norwegian farming culture has had a great influence on *Friluftsliv* and on how Norwegians relate to nature: the work and lifestyle of mountain dairying. It is not solely the national romantic expression of painters and poets that have been influenced by this culture. Being closely connected with and caring deeply for animals, nature and human beings

often developed from the hard work to secure the daily necessities through strenuous dairying tasks located in the mountains. Folk tales and imagination have spun wild stories from the mountain dairy environment, not least about gnomes, trolls and subterranean creatures, where relationships to nature are central to the story. The relationships to nature in a culture can be read equally well as indirect parameters as in the conscious and direct parameters we usually apply (experiences, images, natural descriptions, etc.). Love of and relationship to nature is directly evident in fairy tales and in names and also Norwegian tools and road building.

As an outpost in the outdoor highlands the mountain dairy farm in time served as a model by which the ideas and customs of mountain cabin culture later developed, used and enjoyed for at least one reason similar to its original function: it drew people out into open-air wonders for a shorter or longer period.

In contrast to the life of the mountain dairy farmer cabin life none the less provided (and still provides) relaxation and not work; it was a direct experience of nature, polarized and distinct from work life in the city. Running a mountain dairy meant working on the weekends close to animals and people. Contact with nature, direct and indirect, was characterized by the interplay of work and free time. 'Weekend activity' is different from 'time off from work'. The dairy mountain farm lifestyle has inspired the version of *Friluftsliv* defined by city culture but has its unique values and skills, unapplied in the recent developments of rural *Friluftsliv*, yet are independent of city culture expressions.

There is yet another trait of modern *Friluftsliv* which claims long traditions: the desire to be daring and the need to explore. The ancient saga Norse historian, Snorre Sturlason, has written the account of Norwegian Vikings and their unbelievably courageous expeditions to the East and in the Western Isles. Leiv Erikson, Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen, explorers all, represent those traditions, while Thor Heyerdahl and Helge Ingstad are modern representatives for the type of *Friluftsliv* oriented toward expeditions and travel experience.

I believe this form for *Friluftsliv* must serve as a background for Norwegian *Friluftsliv*. Without the determination to travel and daring to set out for new places our ancestors would never have followed the melting ice to northern territories. Similar persistence is seen in today's lovers of *Friluftsliv* who otherwise would never have traversed crevasses, paddled rivers nor sailed wild ocean straits. I am not speaking of reckless daring but rather the urge to experience the unknown which is interconnected to love of nature. The Norwegian custom of roaming and trekking had a significant influence on *Friluftsliv* in Norway and finds its roots in this tradition. It is not necessary to overly heroize ourselves or the Vikings to realize that we pursue similar urges today.

Nansen was a guest in nature such that his 'business' of survival was tied to a growing society focused on a modern lifestyle in spite of his personal criticisms of modern life. The alternative is a society in balance with nature. Norway has had such a society: the Sami culture. These communities were based on hunting and reindeer hunting in the arctic spheres in balance with nature. One wonders why Norwegian *Friluftsliv* did not model itself on the skills and insights of the Sami culture?

To answer the question several explanations are necessary. The Sami speak a different language and wear unusual clothes; this strangeness in itself has inhibited Sami culture to function as an ideal culture, in spite of the fact that they are native aborigines of the north. Another reason is that Norwegian *Friluftsliv* was developed in the south, by the culture of the

city, far from the influence of Sami culture. Finally, *Friluftsliv* developed as a part-time activity which was characterized by the desire for short-term experiences, challenges and close contact with nature.

The plight facing *Friluftsliv* this century is that the values and skills required for engagement in *Friluftsliv* are in uniquely different from, in fact in opposition to, the values and skills necessary for life in modern society.

Friluftsliv up to Today

During the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s a spontaneous and enthusiastic development of *Friluftsliv* occurred. Examples are the organization of Tourist Associations, Ski Organizations and Mountain Summit Clubs. Further, special and unique equipment was created for *Friluftsliv*. Moreover, *Friluftsliv* was associated with the larger framework of Nansen, but dominated by the unreflective touring lifestyle which included strong nature experiences.

Cabins, nature paths, cars were viewed in the 1920s and 1930s as a great blessing which allowed more extensive participation for more people. Car trips in open cars were considered a part of *Friluftsliv*. WWII experiences produced a deeper sense of nature. *Friluftsliv* literature was published which witnessed resolute commitment. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Norwegian society experienced unsavory development, not least with regard to industrialization. Environmentalism struggled to the forefront, but few *Friluftsliv* promoters sensed a contradiction in terms between the developing industrialization and *Friluftsliv*. The same persons, in fact, were often industrial giants as well as lovers of *Friluftsliv*.

These obvious crosscurrents could not continue unarrested largely due to increasing concerns about pollution and destruction of nature at a time when ecological discoveries and close contact with nature was growing adamant. Modern lifestyle became the focus of the *Friluftsliv* prophets of the 1970s. National parks and nature reservations that developed in the 1960s did not, however, address the issues of grey snow in the mountains and acid rain in the waters, dying fjords and DDT in animals and birds.

Largely because of these advancing problems, a simple and uncomplicated type of *Friluftsliv* could not continue. Collaboration between nature lovers and environmentalists developed from a belief in a classical philosophy of environmentalism toward an ecological and populist critique of Norwegian industrialism. In the 1970s the Hemsedal Mountain College offered a concrete analysis of the criticism in the field of *Friluftsliv*. At the same time a revival of a natural lifestyle based on ecology with traditions from Norwegian farm communities took place. The goal was to choose forms of *Friluftsliv* which were in harmony with Norwegian *Friluftsliv* on the one hand and Norwegian traditions of sustenance farming on the other. Fishing, hunting, berrying, managing domestic farm animals, cultivating berries, vegetables and useful plants became relevant activities.

Disregarding popular elements of alternative hippy-type cultures, it is clear that outdoor life movements have realized a *Friluftsliv* perspective which must be pursued: *Friluftsliv* is as much a part of the countryside as the city. *Friluftsliv* must not become a flight from reality nor a simple recreation for city culture, but must maintain an ecological balance between leisure time activities for city and village culture. The form for *Friluftsliv* can include both

pure luxury activities such as climbing and glacier travel and also self sustenance activities such as hunting, fishing and cultivating.

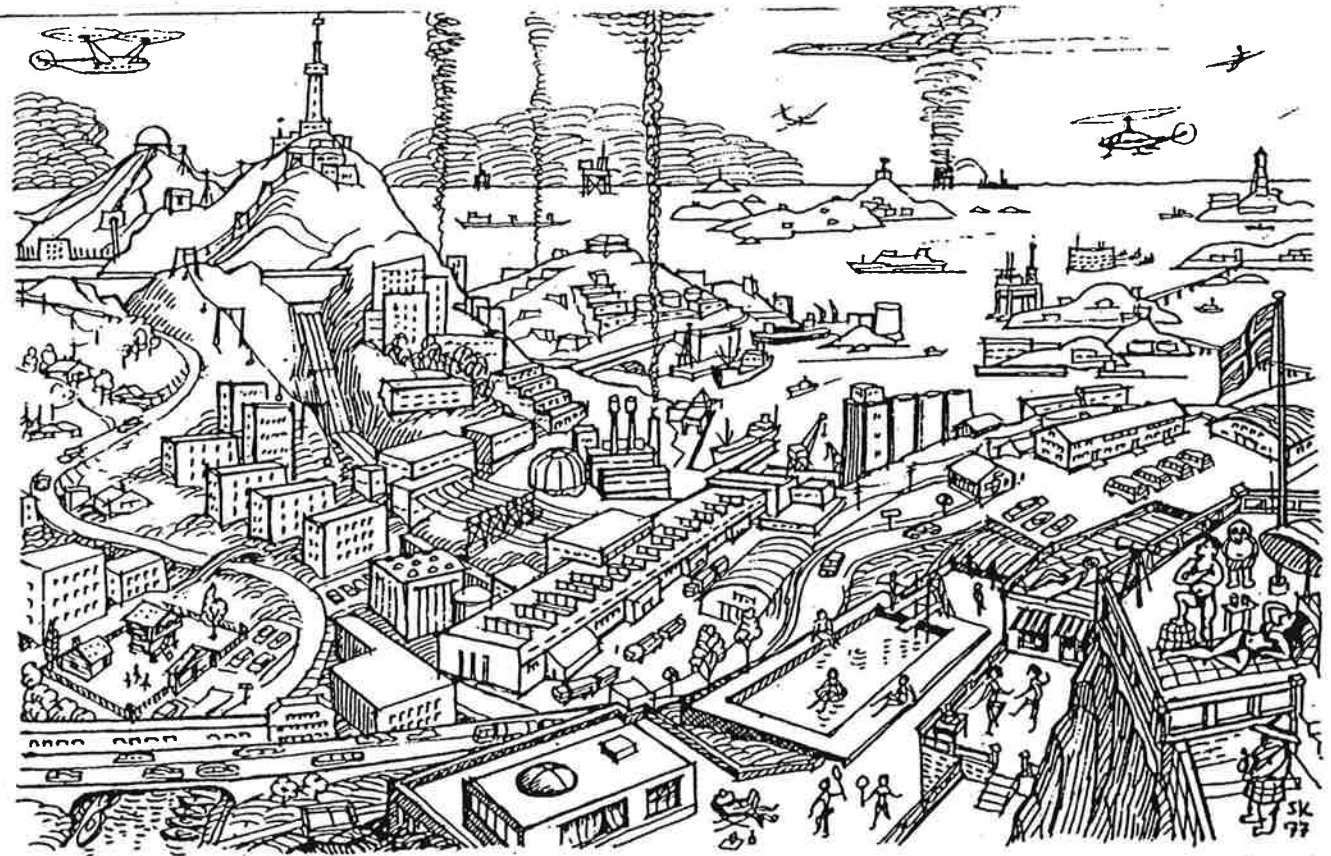
This understanding of *Friluftsliv* can strengthen the country village culturally and ease the transition to a society based on ecological balance with nature. The United Nations environmental program in the 1970s underscores this thinking. Our world needs a new global ethics and a revitalized life style. *Friluftsliv* can provide the educational methodology for these trends.

In summary, *Friluftsliv* has regained a holistic perspective which provides more than a means of recreation for the modern city society. At the same time, it is less naïve. The simple, carefree roaming in the great outdoors has been replaced by a *Friluftsliv* characterized by reflection and ecological insight. This does not mean to suggest that one is obliged to get depressed while walking in the woods, but it does indicate that one should exert greater awareness of one's current *Friluftsliv* pursuits. We owe it to future generations.

In conclusion, one might ask: What is the future of *Friluftsliv*? Will we be seeing campgrounds in nature reservations enclosed by barbed wire, or with people-counting machines and guards as occur in the USA?

I fear the worst. If we focus on nature-physical fitness, recreation, *Friluftsliv*, travel and mass tourism, in a few years Norway will again become 'the playground of Europe.' And that, I believe, will be the end of pristine Norwegian nature. Then we can surely return to the reading of Peter Wessel Zapffe: "Farewell Norway" and confirm that he was right. I appeal to city folk. There is still time to pick berries and hunt! City folk, there is still time to reject the commercialism of sellers and city organizers and live a simple, reflective and joyous *Friluftsliv*!

We are not ready to give up, are we?



Norsk landskap i to faser.

Two stages of Norwegian
Landscape.