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FRILUFTSLIV - A WAY HOME

By Nils Faarlund

Contemporary Norwegian culture - European culture, Western culture - has become estranged from the *home* of mankind. We belong to cultures which have failed to *recreate* a sense of *free* nature as our true - archetypical nature, recognized by its rhythms and tides. Because our cultures have failed to pass on this precious understanding, free nature has lost *standing*. Where humans are left without a home, made fugitives in the world, we feel lost, alone. Modern culture, instead of reintroducing us to nature, encourages our solitude by insisting that it is a *virtue* to be *outstanding*, a «separate individual», a true, objective, *observer*. Alone, we are prey to anxiety, we feel *afraid*. Afraid, some turn *aggressive* towards the foreign - other humans, or nature. Some reject a confrontation, becoming *followers*. Either they follow the aggressive, or feeling hopeless and powerless, they turn cynical, or even mad.

In cultures where free nature has lost standing, people release aggression through their work, but also through their leisure, especially in outdoor recreation. Where nature has lost standing, it usually becomes the victim of this aggression - humans think of themselves as Descartes' *maître et possesseur de la nature*. Coupled with the technological prowess made possible by Newtonian natural science, it is no surprise that the world today is in the throes of an ecological crisis.

If you are one of those who feel at home in free nature, there is no need to persuade you of the consequences of this crisis; you have probably been feeling them for some time.

If you are an objective but attentive «observer» of nature, you might be persuaded of the gravity of the situation by «crisis literature» such as *Mankind at the Turing Point* (Mesarovic and Pestel, 1974).

If you see nature only as a resource, nothing less than a crisis which breaks into your daily life - massive fish kills, a dying forest - will suffice to wake you up.

But the future is not uniformly black. There are still ways out of the crisis, ways opened by a sense of joy with nature. In Norway, the tradition of *friluftsliv* is a way of recreating understanding for nature, of rediscovering the true home of mankind. *Friluftsliv* (pronounced «free-loofts leave», and meaning literally: «open-air life») is similar to, but not exhausted by the English term «outdoor recreation:» it has resonances in the french *la vie en plain air*; in the english «nature-life», or in the archaic english term «nature-faerd.»

However it is translated, *friluftsliv* draws on traditional crafts, tools, and lore from a Norwegian culture which was still consonant with the rhythms of free nature. Its roots and values are in harmony with the *poesophy* (poetry/philosophy) in



the European Deep Romantic Movement of the last century.

Fridtjof Nansen, (1861-1930), polar explorer and humanitarian, was an especially strong inspiration towards *friluftsliv*. In 1888 this national hero had skied across Greenland, and in 1895 he set out in an (unsuccessful) attempt to reach the North Pole on skis. As Norway's ambassador to the League of Nations, he worked tirelessly to bring peace to a war-torn Continent - and in the meantime inspired many Europeans to take up skiing!

Nansen urged that an alternative raising of youth should avoid the tendency towards «tourism» - superficial acquaintance - in all aspects of life. In addition, he contended that the use of technology in outdoor life had to be «appropriate», and that only an ample opportunity for life in free nature would foster responsible and

mature people. Nansen's writing revealed a sense of cooperation with nature's awesome power, and equally important, a sense of joy in being in nature. And his belief that free nature was our true home was explicit:

That which could revive us and lead us back to a more human existence is to take up a simple life in nature; in the forest, plains or mountains, on the high plateaus, in the great, lonely emptiness, where new and greater thoughts stream into us and leave a mark that cannot be easily erased ... one feels something basic, something that feels like one's real self, and one comes back with a fresher and healthier view of life than we have in the city.

Mountaineer-poet Carl Rubenson (1885-1960) was also a source of *friluftsliv* philosophy. «There is much in a person», he wrote after returning from a long pilgrimage through the Himalaya,

that present-day life, especially in the cities, does not call use; half-forgotten abilities and instincts from a time when man lived together with nature, and had to struggle with nature's power to maintain his existence - we don't have to do that today. But there is still something left in us from those times. In every healthy human being there is a deep need to feel at home in nature, to show himself that his mind has roots, roots which have not yet lost their grip in the earth. It is that need which drives us city-folk out to the sea, into the forest, and up onto the mountains.

Even if *friluftsliv* cannot, in the final analysis, be translated into words, it has been so important in our recent (140) years that many Norwegians have tried. A sense for the Norwegian mountains «soaring out of the sea» is expressed in our national anthem written by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Henrik Ibsen's poem «Paa Vidderne» introduced the word «*friluftsliv*» to Norwegian literature in a paean to the rough purities of «nature-life».

Besides words, other mediums have also been used to convey a feeling for natural values. The music of Kierulf, Nordraak and Grieg gave diversity and fullness to the expressions of a folk tradition with roots firmly in the land. Finally, artists like I. C. Dahl and H. Gude tried to portray nature's magnificence on canvas.

Something these artists, composers and writers have in common is that they all were part of the Deep Romantic tradition



of the nineteenth century. At a time when the industrial revolution was threatening to do its utmost to tear man *away* from his natural surroundings, the Romantic movement celebrated the possibility of man's *identity* with nature. It hearkened to the joys found in unadorned nature, and claimed that man could find fulfillment of his deepest urges *immediately* there.

The message of Nansen, Rubenson, and the Deep Romantic movement was not to be mistaken: they were pointing to a rediscovery of free nature. The Romantic movement struck a deep chord in the soul of Norwegians, and led to a revival of national identity - *this* is Norway, this free nature, and we are unique as Norwegians to have it. The German philosopher Schelling's «Nature is visible Spirit, Spirit is invisible Nature», epitomized this reawakened sensitivity to the land. The implication, of course, was that contemporary Norwegians in cities - and Europeans in general - had *already* lost that identity with nature. And this irony is reflected out by the beginnings of *friluftsliv* as a social phenomenon. Like the Romantic artists who travelled around Norway in search of subjects to paint, those who streamed out of the city in their wake were *urbanized* men and women. The natives of the countryside had, in a sense, never left the land, and so felt no need to be reunited with it. Instead, rural people played «interpreter»; squiring city-folk around so that the latter could «find their roots.»

This sometimes presented an amusing spectacle, but the sincerity of these city dwellers should not be doubted. Even in those early days, the «civilized» inhabitants of Norway were realizing the heavy toll of being excluded from the «real» Norway - the Norway that was sung by

the poets the continent and of their own land.'

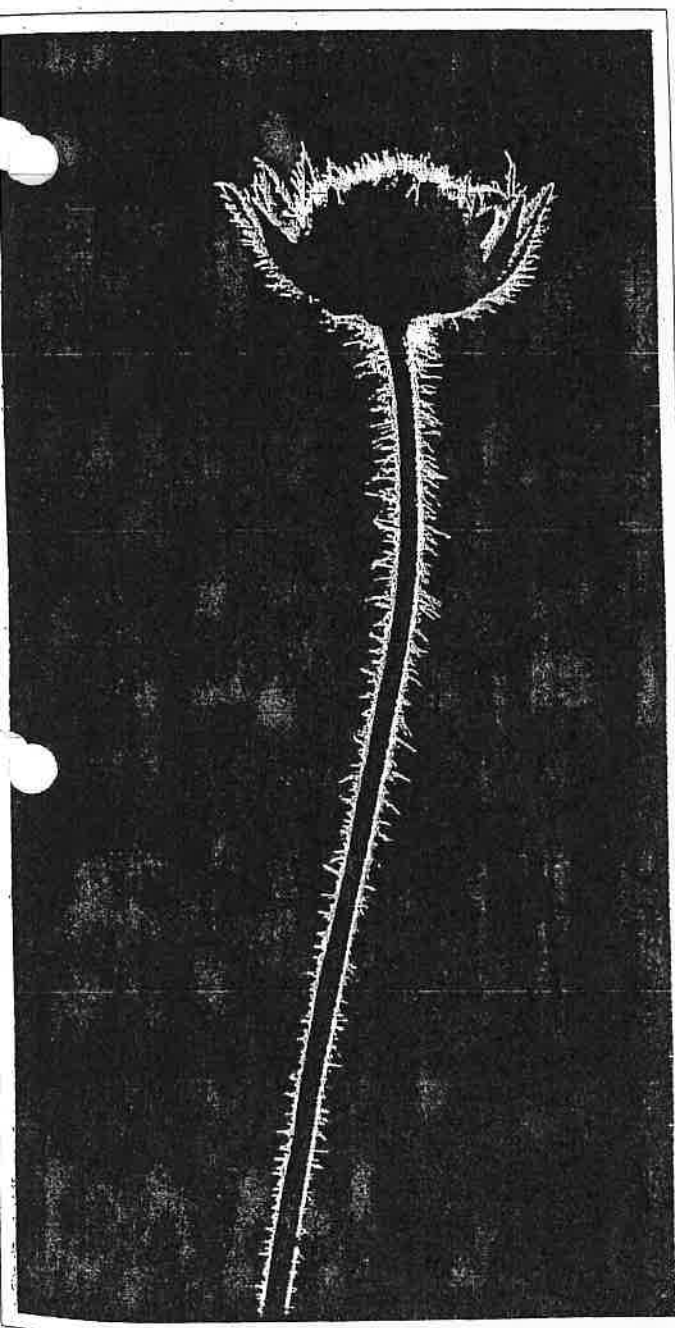
This urge to regain citizenship in the «real» Norway still touches Norwegians deeply. Swedes and Danes use the term *friluftsliv* too - but apply it also to rac on groomed ski tracks, painstakingly marked trails through rural farmland, or cabin-cruising through crowded holiday archipelagos. On the other hand, most Norwegian outdoorspeople react quite strongly if told they are *not* engaged in «genuine» *friluftsliv*. In Norway the word has a more limited usage, applying to experience of *free* nature.

Above all, *friluftsliv* is an expression of Romanticism. Rather than laying down fixed rules about what it includes, we can say they show respect for natural processes and for the realization of all life. It takes place in (relatively) free nature, without the use of technical means of transport (e.g. motor vehicles). *Friluftsliv* presents a diverse range of challenges to the total person, and is an opportunity for emotional, physical, and intellectual engagement. The extent and quality of the *friluftsliv* experience is a free choice of the participant, according to his or her own abilities.

Carl Gustav Jung argues throughout his work in psychology that fundamental to all humans is a recollection of archetypes. Having lived for more than a hundred thousand generations in an environment where the non-human, rather than the human, was dominant, it should be hardly surprising that many of our archetypes involved free nature. To understand ourselves, then, to realize our potential for being a human being, we must communicate intimately with that which is - in some sense - the most *inhuman*: wild, undeveloped nature. *Friluftsliv*, in challenging us to respond in body, mind, and

with the rhythms of the natural environment, is our best opportunity for development.

Friluftsliv is a paradigm shift: away from a dominant «objective» view of nature and towards an emotive identity with nature characteristic of Romanticism. By using the Romantic tradition as an example I do not mean we should become «romantic about the past.» Rather, I mean that the search for a more multi-sided relationship with nature *need* not be exclusively in Western traditions or in the «new physics.»



We have the roots for such a relationship in our traditional cultures - and we have not completely lost them!

We might get a feel for what *friluftsliv* is by naming a few things it is *not*. It is not *sport*, in the sense of physical activity in a selfish, competitive way; staying fit to compensate for an otherwise unnatural and unhealthy lifestyle. It does not take place in carefully prepared arenas designed to smooth out the «vagaries» of nature and ensure «fair competition» and exciting action.

Nor do I mean that *friluftsliv* is *tourism*, in the sense of the business and practice of rapid transit through different places. Such journeys are inspired by and produce a sense of alienation from our environment and the people around us.

Friluftsliv isn't a *scientific excursion*, teaching us about the «scientific» processes in nature, collecting specimens of objective interest. This approach to nature eliminates an emotive sense for nature, a *poesophic* appreciation that *friluftsliv* encourages.

Neither is *friluftsliv* a «trade show» style of grand Himalayan mountaineering expedition, display windows for sponsors, equipment, wealth, tourism, competitive adventures, using nature as a «sparring partner», etc.

Finally, *friluftsliv* should not be modelled as *outdoor activity*, in the sense of a safety valve for a fundamentally anti-natural lifestyle or aggression. It is not meant to shore up our modern way of life, but to help us - as individuals and as a society - *out* of it.

Friluftsliv evokes such strong responses in Norwegian society because it evokes a *national* identity, a sense of really «belonging» to their land, a sense that predominated in Norway as recently as the Second

World War. (In the nineteenth century, it was also a kind of statement of fashion consciousness - little Norway, on the outskirts of Europe, was finally in tune with the Romantic fervor sweeping the rest of the Continent.) *Friluftsliv* conveys social identity in a similarly two-edged way, both as a «real» Norwegian and as a member of the upper class who must go *back* to nature. Finally, it conveys an *individual* identity in the same way that Nansen described, by paring a persona built in the city down to some sort of «essential self.»

In the Norwegian context, *friluftsliv* is a living tradition for re-creating nature-consonant lifestyles. It implies making friends with nature, and passionately re-creating free nature's standing in our culture. It is an unselfish «I-thou» relationship that tries to come away from the anthropocentrism of a nature-dissonant society.

More than just an individual pastime, *friluftsliv* is a tradition inspiring an active response to an ecological crisis. It points towards a new way of living with other people and with our planet.

It is a poor «media event» in the eyes of the networks. In its proper perspective, though, *friluftsliv* is more significant than an event at the Olympics, - it is as much social movement as physical activity. It is a step towards a lifestyle in which there is no *need* to seek our home through *friluftsliv*. In this sense, the goal of *friluftsliv* is to make itself unnecessary.

«There is no way leading to peace», wrote Gandhi, «Peace is the way». *Friluftsliv* is not an armed battle, not a sports event, not an academic discipline, but a move towards lasting cultural change. It is a *process* - a process of joy. There is no force stronger than joy. *Friluftsliv* as a way Home is a way of joy. Go for it!

