

SKARA



Out and About

In and around Skara





Contents

The Plain

1 Skara City	4
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Valle Valley

2 Höjentorp – Drottningkullen	8
3 Höjentorps Castle Ruin	12
4 Varnhem Monastery	14
5 Jättadalen / Öglunda cave	16
6 Axevalla Moor	18

Lake Hornborga

7 Ore backar	20
8 Dancing Cranes	22
9 Utloppet	24

Marshland

10 Rösjö Marsh	26
-----------------------------	----

Freedom to roam	29
Walks & Tours	30

Legend, maps

- P** Parking
- Bath
- Don't miss
- Toilet
- Picknick point
- Pilgrim's Way

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Government grants to local
 conservation projects help
 finance this project.



Legend has it that giants laid down their hats in order to keep the elements at bay. But according to the geologists, it is the hard diabase rock that prevents the table hills from eroding..

Thanks to the Giants

The sun rises over the crest of Sweden's largest table hill, Billingen, whose vertical cliffs, dark forests and vast marshes are the home of mountain giants. It offers a spectacular view over chunky, lush hills towards the plain and one of the most bird-rich lakes in Europe. This cultural landscape has been inhabited by man since the Stone Age.

These hills are entirely unlike any other mountainous region in Scandinavia, and they offer a lot to be grateful of. Under their hard stone hats, they hold limestone from prehistoric

coral reefs that have given us cherry blossom valleys and rolling hills sprinkled with hepatica and orchids. The giant boulders left behind by the receding ice sheet are worth a special mention for having created the fairy tale hills that surround the foot of Billingen.

The landscape around Skara offers plenty of shimmering green and blue adventures. This guide will lead you to ten of them. Pack a picnic basket or your pilgrim's staff, your binoculars or your fishing rod, the children's pram or a canoe – bring it all or nothing. Enjoy!

Skara city

An urban savannah

A green zone with plenty of ancient trees and flowering herbs is found near the Cathedral in central Skara. It is a haven for bats, birds, butterflies and people. Enter it, and you will be surrounded by a green and peaceful bubble of calm.

A wildlife oasis

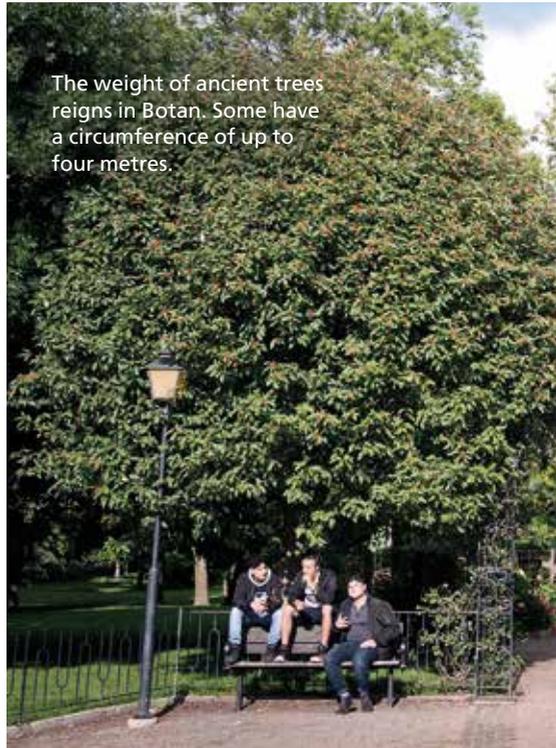
Starting at the old cemetery, the Botanical Gardens (Botan), the Victoria Lakes and the Fornbyn open-air museum are aligned along a verdant stretch of murmuring trees. Biologists refer to the area as an “urban savannah” as the old trees, flowering herbs, shrubbery, water features and sandy soils are the home of a diverse flora and fauna. More than seven different bat species forage among the treetops at dusk, which is as many as you will find in the surrounding agrarian landscape.

Botan

The green heart of Skara is Botan, a botanical garden that Peter Hernqvist, a disciple of Carl Linnaeus, began to work on in 1776. Many of the old ash-trees found here were planted in his lifetime. Other 17th century features include a beech grove, an oak grove and a pasture. There was a period of decline following Hernqvist's death in 1808, but the gardens were restored to their former glory a hundred years later. Today, at first glance, Botan may appear much like any other park, but rare trees, including ginkgo, katsura, Caucasian wingnut, Himalayan birch and Manchurian cherry, grow here. Many of the trees in the park have wide canopies that seem to be made solely for the purpose of embracing

stressed city dwellers and invite you to enjoy a picnic underneath them. They emit a soothing hush and birdsong despite the noise from the surrounding city. Along the western perimeter is a small herb garden with motherwort, valerian, Echinacea and other medicinal plants.

The weight of ancient trees reigns in Botan. Some have a circumference of up to four metres.





 **Don't miss:** Entering into the old cottages at Fornbyn. Get a feeling for how people huddled together in the tiny, dark rooms, sometimes with only a ten-centimetre-high window. If you like vintage objects, visit the coffee shop in the old store where you will find 1940s-style bottles and tins.

 **Wildlife:** Look for linnets, goldfinches, northern bats, pied flycatchers, yellow anemones, pearly heath and European peacock butterflies, and parrot toadstools.

 **Picnic spots:** Practically anywhere in the botanical gardens or Fornbyn.

 **Getting there:** Park at Skara Cathedral (a prime destination that goes back to the 11th century). To get to Fornbyn, walk down Skolgatan to Botan or follow signs for the Västergötland Museum.



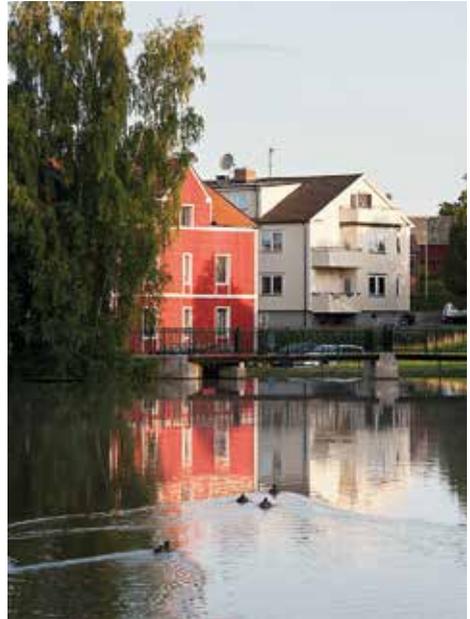
Fornbyn

The old buildings in Fornbyn have been moved there from various locations in Skaraborg County. There is a village shop, a forge, a chapel, an inn and many small cottages. Millennia and centuries come together – from Stone Age tombs to veteran motorcars. Old-fashioned fruit trees, vegetables and flowers are cultivated in between the houses.

This little shortcut to the county's historical past doubles as a city park and cultural hub. There is always something going on in the summer: fiddlers, singalongs, dog shows, midsummer celebrations ... and in the autumn the city's seven-year-olds get to spend a day living as people did in the 19th century.

Fornbyn was founded in 1921 and is now part of the Västergötland Museum. It is contemporary with the Stockholm open-air museum Skansen.

The leafy, murmuring trees continue inside the Fornbyn open-air museum with its historical stone cists, dry stone walls, wells, milestones, sawmill, belfry and lychgate.



The Victoria Lakes

You can glimpse the mirror surface of the Victoria Lakes from the northeast corner of Botan. They form the centre of a peaceful walk. These ponds were named for Gustaf Viktor Hofling and his wife Hilda Josefina Victoria. Hofling was an industrious man who not only had the Victoria Lakes dug out, he also established Skara's first factory (for making tiles) in 1894. From the "Victoria Falls" the water flows into one of the city's life-giving blue veins, the river Dofsan/ Drysan.



Enjoy the rhododendrons in Botan, Skara's most diverse park. It also includes rare trees such as gingko, katsura, Caucasian wingnut, Himalaya birch and Manchurian cherry.

Höjentorp – The Drottningkullen Nature Reserve

Höjentorp-Drottningkullen is the largest of six nature reserves in the Valle area. Walk for miles under the dense tree canopy across flowering pastures, lime-rich marshes dotted with dark forest tarns and through alder wetlands where alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage sparkles in spring.

Legend has it that Drottningkullen (Queen's Hill) was named for Queen Ulrika Eleonora who stood here in 1722 and watched as Höjentorp Castle burned to the ground. Today, you can no longer see Höjentorp from this point since the hill is now snugly embedded in the firm embrace of elm and hazel, but when the trees have shed their leaves you can make out Varnhem Abbey. Drottningkullen is situated on the left-hand side of the road, near the main car park (there is another large car park at Höjentorp). The hill may have lost its former vista, but there are still plenty of green undulating hills worthy of a queen.

Large parts of the nature reserve are becoming overgrown; still, these hills and the elms evoke a fairy tale landscape that could be mistaken for a rainforest. Dödisgroparna turn into dark hazel caves with sun spots dancing on the floor and there is a lingering scent of wild garlic and wood anemones in the little valleys.

There are over 1,000 large deciduous trees (with a circumference of over 70 cm) – mostly oak and elm – at Höjentorp–Drottningkullen nature reserve. Eggby is derived from the Danish word for oak, egg.

 **Don't miss:** The fallen hollow oak to the north of the path and west of Drottningkullen. Any small, brave person can crawl several metres through the dark inside of the log

 **Wildlife:** Wild garlic, bird's eye primrose, pigeon scabious, marsh helleborine and red-backed shrike

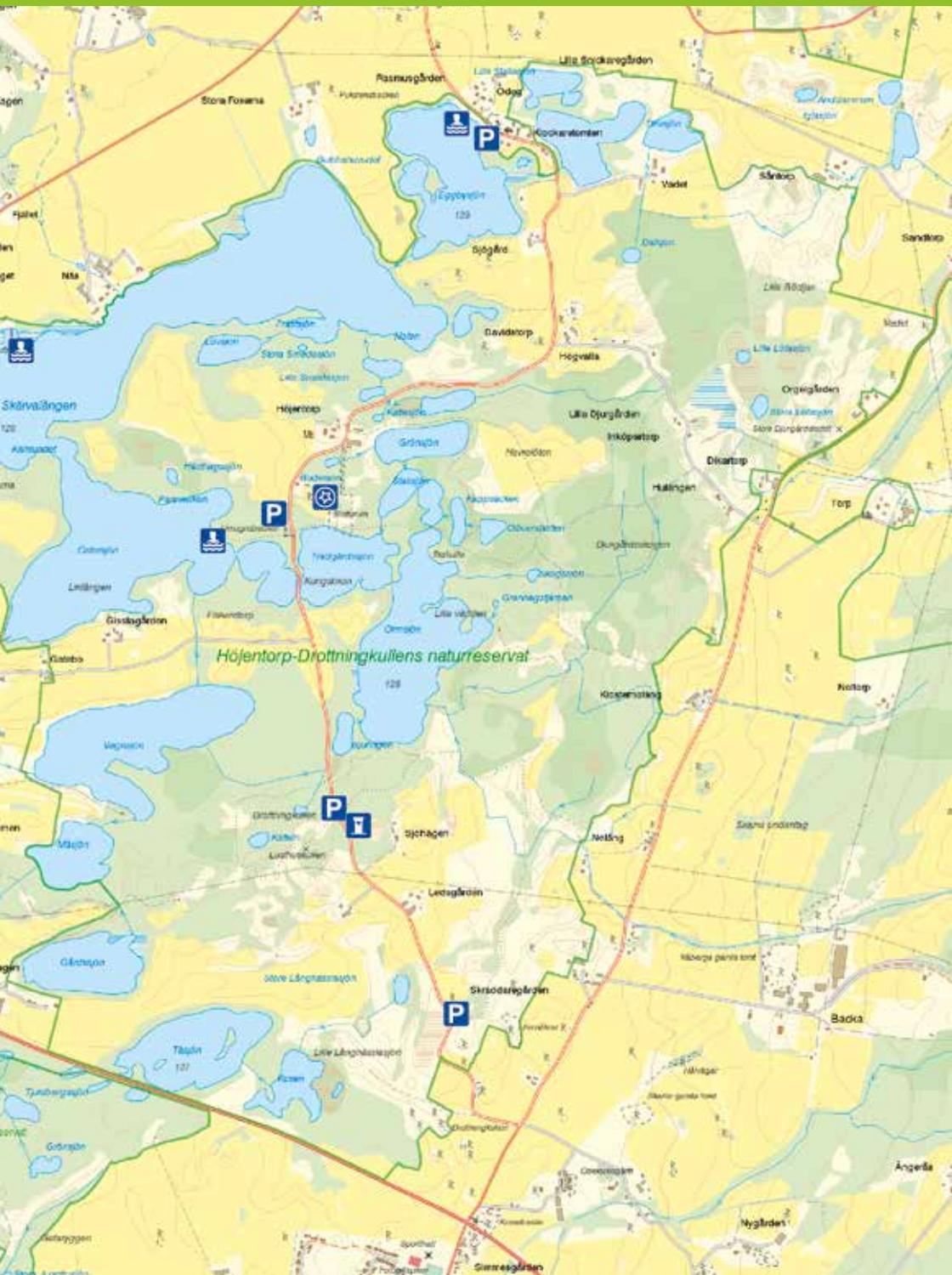
 **Picnic spots:** There are many suitable picnic spots. Drottningkullen itself is best in the spring, before it becomes overgrown.

 **Getting there:** Join road 49 from Skara towards Skövde. At the Varnhem junction turn left towards Öglunda. Shortly afterwards turn left again towards Eggby. If you want to look for rare plants on open ground, stop at the first car park by the nature reserve sign. But you will still hear the noise from road 49. The next car park is larger. From there you can access Drottningkullen by turning west on the path and following the first steep hill on the left.



The undulating
landscape makes your
body and mind soar.





Höjentorp Castle Ruin

Flowering rocks and a royal connection

If the beautiful hills of Valle could be said to have a heart, it would be in the form of Höjentorp Castle Ruin. Royalty have enjoyed the verdant landscape and glittering lakes here for centuries.

Höjentorp Castle was once a royal residence whose turrets were reflected in the lake in the park, Trädgårdssjön. But it was built of wood, and in 1722 it burned to the ground. When Carl Linnaeus visited the ruins 25 years later, he stated that it would have been hard to find a match for the former “kongsgård” anywhere. It may seem odd to have built a royal demesne here, but Valle was a central community in the County of Västergötland, only a short distance from Varnhem Monastery and Skara. Gustav Vasa, John III, Charles IX and Charles XI were some of the kings of Sweden that often resided at Höjentorp.

Today, only the stone steps leading up to the courtyard and a basement – possibly part of a medieval castle that was burned by the Danes in 1566 – remain. The area around the ruins still shows the signs of a royal park with such gracious plants as Turk’s cap lilies, aquilegia and wild garlic.

Since anything green is good for you, walking around here must be a very healthy pursuit as you are surrounded by layers of greenery climbing up the hills with green caves made up of wild garlic, dog’s mercury and majestic lime trees. If you continue walking east towards Lake Ormsjön, the lush landscape turns into coniferous woodland where marsh-myrtle and saw-sedge grow. The Höjentorp-

 **Don't miss:** West of the castle ruin is a path that leads to an island in a field that features a large stone table. Charles XI allegedly signed a document here, which put a government body in charge of a military allotment system that required farmers to provide soldiers for the King's army. After signing the document, the King banged his fist on the table and declared that this institution would survive as long as the table. In 1901, the top cracked as two boys were moving it, and the same year the allotment system was abolished.

 **Wildlife:** Bird's eye primrose, lungwort, Solomon's seal, cowbane, lesser spotted woodpecker, tawny owl.

 **Picnic spots:** The most obvious spot is above the steps to the castle ruin. If you are looking for privacy, find the little jetty. The seats overlooking the lake are completely surrounded by reeds. The perfect spot is where the dragonflies reside. But the water gets deep beyond the jetty, so it is less suitable for small children. To get there, do not head for the castle ruin from the car park, follow the west-bound path instead.

 **Getting there:** Road 49 from Skara towards Skövde. Turn left towards Öglunda at Varnhem junction. Drive a short distance and turn right towards Eggby. After a few kilometres, you will reach the car park Höjentorp Castle Ruin.



In May, there is a scent of wild garlic over hills around Höjentorp.

Drottningkullen nature reserve is the largest in the Valle area, and you can extend your walk far beyond the well-trodden paths around the castle ruin.



The common noctule is one of fourteen bat species that fly around Valle County in the summer. This is one of the most bat-rich areas in Sweden.

Varnhem Monastery and Kata Farm

A journey throughout the ages on glass floors and through mazes

The 12th century Varnhem Abbey is one of the most visited destinations in Skara. From the abbey, you can continue among the ruins of the monastery and up to Kata Farm. Suddenly, beneath your feet, you will come across an even older church and the remains of a Viking woman who was a prominent figure here in early Christianity.

Old arches, columns and walls are covered in toadflax, sedum and silky wall feather-moss. The ruins of the Cistercian monk cells are like a great maze, perfect for playing hide and seek. Follow the conduits where water from a source was led to the kitchen and washroom (where the monks shaved their heads.) The signage will help you envisage how they ate their vegetarian meals in the five-metre-high stone refectory under a vow of silence.

In a corner of the cemetery is a simple museum and on the hill behind it is Kata Farm, which opened in 2017. The thousand-year-old church ruins have been given a glass roof to walk on. This is the oldest church in Sweden; it existed here before the monastery was built. Look down on the skeleton of Kata, a Viking woman who ran the farm in the 11th century. The history of this site is evocatively recounted with the help of signs, film footage, stones and bones. To follow the Viking Age by walking on glass while seeing the monastery through the tall windows feels like moving between different time dimensions.



 **Don't miss:** The herb garden next to the ruined monastery with old medicinal plants such as foxglove, sweet-scented bedstraw and hyssop. Outside the perimeter of the monastery you will come across catmint, motherwort, henbane and other plants that survive from the time of the monks.

 **Picnic spots:** The cafeteria or one of the seats inside the monastery ruins.

 **Getting there:** Road 49 to Varnhem. Enter the town and follow signs for the monastery. By public transport you will get to Varnhem in 18 minutes by catching the no.1 or no. 200 bus from Skara to Varnhem.



Varnhem and the monastery were part of an important central community that was not only spiritual, but political, cultural and economic. The founder of Stockholm, Birger Jarl, is buried in the abbey and, legend has it, so are four other Swedish medieval kings.



The Viking church in front of its 1,000-year-old remains.

Jättadalen Valley and Öglunda Cave

Vertical cliffs and secret ravines

Jättadalen (Giants' Valley) is the perfect place for giants with its wild cliffs and angular boulders that appear to have been thrown in anger. That said, it's an advantage to be small at Öglunda Cave.

The vertical cliffs at Jättadalen overlook the entire Valle region with a view all the way to Kinnekulle. The walk up to the cave is full of adventures and therefore suitable for families, although the path is sometimes steep and uneven. There is a freshwater source you can drink from, rapids with rocks to jump on, mountains to climb (with rope and chain), stomach-turning precipices and, at the end – a cave. The cave is situated about fifteen minutes' walk through an unexciting industrial forest, and you will soon begin to wonder whether you have gone too far. This is unlikely if you have followed the orange signs from the viewpoint. A sign marks the arrival point. From there, the path plummets into a deep crevice and continues into the ravine, which is full of small boulders and strange holes you can fill with your own stories. Don't expect an enormous chamber, because what looks like a cave is only a small portion of a secretive whole. The small cave to the left as you enter the ravine is called Grandfather's Chamber. It is large enough for five children. Turn to the right at the bottom and continue about 40 metres and you will come to another cave. The whole ravine, with tall diabase pillars on all sides, is called Öglunda Cave.

 **Don't miss:** The sacred source along the path to the viewpoint. People used to come from afar to be cured in its magic waters. There is a long-standing tradition of throwing coins in the water. It was named "Source of the Year" in 2008.

 **Wildlife:** Hawfinch, raven and nutcracker.

 **Picnic spots:** The obvious spot is the outlook above the waterfall, but if you are travelling with small or very active children, the first outlook with a view of the waterfall might be more suitable. It can be hard to enjoy the view with a sheer drop only a few metres away.

 **Getting there:** Park at Öglunda Church and follow the marked trail to Jättadalen.

On the back of this brochure is a picture of the view from Jättadalen.



The lookout at Öglunda was inaugurated in 1910 to the accompaniment of gun salutes and a choir. It was demolished in 1964, but some dream of reconstructing it.

Jättadalen is a deep ravine surrounded by diabase crags and eroded clay slate. There are 10–20-metre-deep sheer drops in some places. During your walk, you will notice a clear difference between the fertile lime soils of the Valle plain and the poor soils of the coniferous forest.



Axevalla Moor

From rattling gun fire to peaceful butterflies

Hundreds of years of war games and grazing livestock have turned Axevalla Moor into a large, flowering field where Arctic blues, forester moths and many other species of butterfly flutter about in the summer.

Axevalla Moor saw its last major military exercise in 1865 when the King commanded 10,000 men marching in formation. After the smoke and gunfire had subsided, a long table was set up and a royal feast began.

There was a military exercise ground here between 1696 and 1916. In the early 1800s, most of the trees were cut down, marshland and prehistoric tombs were filled in and the ground levelled to form the flat area we see here today.

Only a few waterlogged recesses remain. At Midsummer, you can make yourself giddy by smelling yellow bedstraw and watching butterflies of every shade (especially if you have brought along a net). Gold-tailed melitta bees buzz between the harebells that offer food and a place to sleep. Entomologists would probably prefer that military exercises were still conducted here in order to keep the vegetation at bay so more bees could dig their nests in the ground. These days, grazing cattle are kept here by the local farming

community in accordance with an agreement that dates back to 1878.

Axevalla Moor has the same junipers and lowering sky as the Alvaret Moor on the island of Öland in the Baltic Sea. The noise from Road 49 becomes louder further north; you just have to pretend it's the wind.

Axevalla Fort

These days, Axevalla Fort seems like a forgotten corner of the world. You have to conjure up the tall stone walls of the once royal fort in your mind's eye. This was a perfect site, protected by water on nearly every side. The King would travel back to Stockholm on his way back from southern or western Sweden along the highway. This was the place to stop the Danes and other enemies from reaching further north. Skara, Varnhem Monastery, Ökull Farm and Höjentorp Castle were important landmarks in the Middle Ages. The rivers and lakes were also navigable at the time. No one knows exactly when the fort was built, most probably no later than the 13th century as it is mentioned in a document dated in 1278, when King Magnus was taken prisoner during a banquet at Axevalla by Peter Porse, a Danish knight. The story ends in 1469 when a large contingent of angry farmers took over the fort and set it on fire to avenge their treatment by the castle warden.





Don't miss: The ancient tombs at the centre of the moor. These passage grave remains are over 4,000 years old. They are testament to the fact that Axevalla Moor has been inhabited for a very long period. Eleven compartments containing human bones were found during an excavation in 1805 together with flint knives and amber. All you can see today is a grass-covered mound with a 4 x 5-metre depression at the centre.



Wildlife: Wild thyme, cat's foot, quaking-grass, milkwort, skylark, horned dungbeetle, spring dor beetle, dark green fritillary, grizzled skipper, six-spot burnet.



Picnic spots: By the ruins. You may have your picnic anywhere on the moor, but there is no protection from the elements.



Getting there: Turn off the Varnhem-Axevalla road at the folk high school and continue past it. You can access the moor from different directions. One car park is situated by Pansarmuseet (the armoured vehicle museum) from where you can follow a marked trail to Axevalla.

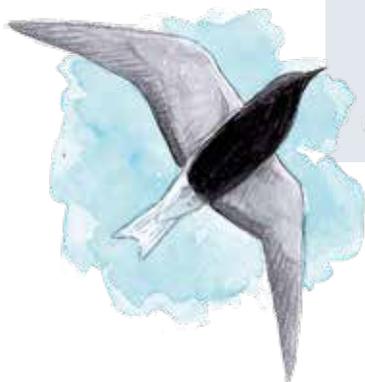
Ore backar

A flying walk from leafy bowers to wide vistas

Children, birdwatchers and families enjoying their picnic are equally catered for at Ore backar. The path runs along the edge of a steep, winding esker. It makes you feel as if you were flying through the landscape.

The walk begins in a green copse with hazel, oak and elm. Whirring wood warblers and shimmering fern distance you from the surrounding world, but after some hundred metres you step back into the light and the rolling oak pastures that run along the shore where there are fallen tree giants to climb on or have your picnic at. Children and biologists have a field day in hollow oaks, along the lake shore or on dunes dotted with bees' nests.

If you can wait until the end of your walk, you could have your picnic at the observation tower situated at the far end of the promontory that takes you to the centre of Lake Hornborga and its birdlife. You might spot a black tern or white-tailed eagle. Cormorants are as good as guaranteed; they nest in the dead willows that were submerged when the water level in the lake was raised. On the other side is the Naturum information centre and Ytterberg, and behind them Mount Billingen.



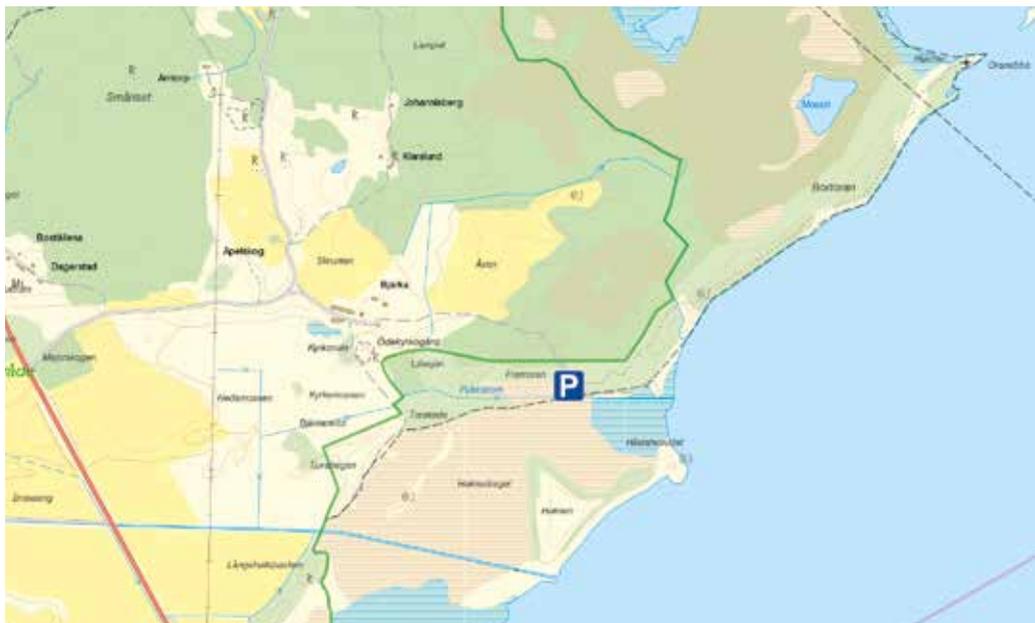
 **Don't miss:** Spring and summer are of course the best time to visit Ore backar, but autumn can be pleasant as the leaves turn yellow and the cranberries ripen on the moor.

 **Children:** It is easy to get children to run along the path at Ore backar. They can fly along the steep ridge and there are plenty of fallen trees to climb on and hazelnut shells and beach finds to discover.

 **Wildlife:** Mullein, hare's-tail cottongrass, moschatel, yellow flag, baneberry, herb-paris, black-headed gull, white-tailed eagle, spotted nutcracker and black tern.

 **Getting there:** Road 184 between Skara and Falköping. Immediately north of the exit for Trandansen is a sign for Ore backar. Drive two kilometres on the gravel road to reach the car park. Or catch the no. 203 bus from Skara. Alight after ten minutes at Bjärka and continue approximately 350 metres along Road 184 until you see the sign for Ore backar.

The black tern belongs to the genus *clidonias*, or marsh terns.



Return via the path that runs along the ridge above the shore. You can switch between northern and southern Sweden with just a turn of the head. Coniferous woods and hare's-tail cottongrass dominate west of the ridge. To the east, the southern landscape beckons with its undulating wildflower meadows and giant oaks.



The most diverse biotope in Sweden is hollow oaks. They are also an excellent biotope for playing in.

At the very end of the esker, everything feels close: the sky, the lake and the foliage of the giant oaks. The shrill call of the terns that sounds across the wet meadows is mixed with the summer song of the blackcap in the lush vegetation. There are few places where you get as close to Lake Hornborga as here. And just across the ridge is the cottongrass marsh. The esker forms a boundary between the green hills and the dark coniferous forest to the west.

Dancing Cranes

A spring festival of time-honoured choreography

Several fields at the southern end of Lake Hornborga have become a place where humans and cranes celebrate the arrival of spring to the cacophony of some 20,000 bills performing a natural score during a month of eating, flirting and dancing.

The first time you witness cranes “dancing” you may think it is an organised event, but the ballet is highly disorganised and spontaneous. One makes a little pirouette, jumps a metre up in the air, spreads its wings, picks up a twig, throws it and extends its neck in preparation of a magnificent fanfare. Sometimes the dance proliferates throughout the flock like a wave. The show is most impressive at dawn and dusk. At mid-day, the cranes tend to focus on feeding, but every now and then they take a few dance steps. While busy picking seeds from the ground, a couple may stop in front of one another, extend their necks and call out for the sky to hear that they belong together and that they will spend yet another summer in each other’s company. Cranes may have been coming here to pause since the last ice sheet receded on the shores of Lake Hornborga, where the water is shallow and warm in spring. When the Dagnäs estate began

to throw out left over potato scraps from their aquavit production on the surrounding fields, the site became even more popular among the cranes. These days, the County Administrative Board distributes grain to these visitors that have flown in from as far away as Spain and North Africa.



Don't miss: The eagle breeding season in January. The carrion that has been deposited here for a number of years attracts scores of white-tailed eagles. More information about guided tours can be found at the County Administrative Board web site.

Picnic spot: At the table overlooking the cranes (but during Easter weekends you may be more likely to be watching the backs of other visitors).

When to go: The cranes are usually at their most numerous in early April. The information point is open in season with information about the cranes, tourist information and café. Bird experts are available some weekends.

Getting there: Road 184, Skara to Falköping. A large car park is situated approximately 1 km north of Bjurum Church, and you can park nearer the church too. Bus no. 203 (Skara-Falköping) stops at “Trandansen”.

The dancing cranes are in Falköping Municipality, the visitors watching them are standing in Skara Municipality.

When the cranes get together in spring they are less shy than in the summer. They often come up to 30–40 metres from the fence. Many other species feel safe in the crowd, especially whoopers, various types of goose and ducks that you get to see at close range.



Utloppet

Bird spotters' paradise

At Utloppet, water from Lake Hornborga flows into the River Flian. The bird tower here is one of the best observation points on the lake, especially when the lake is frozen and the birds crowd together in the open channels.

When the lake freezes over, Utloppet is the only place on Lake Hornborga where you will be able to see birds as the current keeps the water flowing. Coots, tufted ducks, smews, whoopers, mute swans and goosanders crowd together, attracting white-tailed eagles looking for prey. In spring, there is a good chance that you will see and hear red-necked grebes displaying. This is also where you should go to see or hear species that breed among the reeds, such as bearded tit and bittern. Before Lake Hornborga was restored, large areas were almost completely overgrown. Today, reeds are mainly found at the north-western end of the lake. Another good spot for listening to the whirring call of the bearded tit is the mouth of the Härlingstorp Canal to the

north. The best way of getting there is on skates in the winter.

Utloppet is much easier to get to. A wide gravel road leads up to the bird observation tower and the bridge across the River Flian. From there you can look down on the dyke that regulates the water level in the lake. Sometimes fish try to make their way up river in jumps and leaps. But unless you are a keen birdwatcher, there is not much else to see here.



The black-necked grebe is the pride of Lake Hornborga. Birdwatchers come from afar to see them.

 **Don't miss:** The snow-white great egret. It has become a recurring visitor to Lake Hornborga.

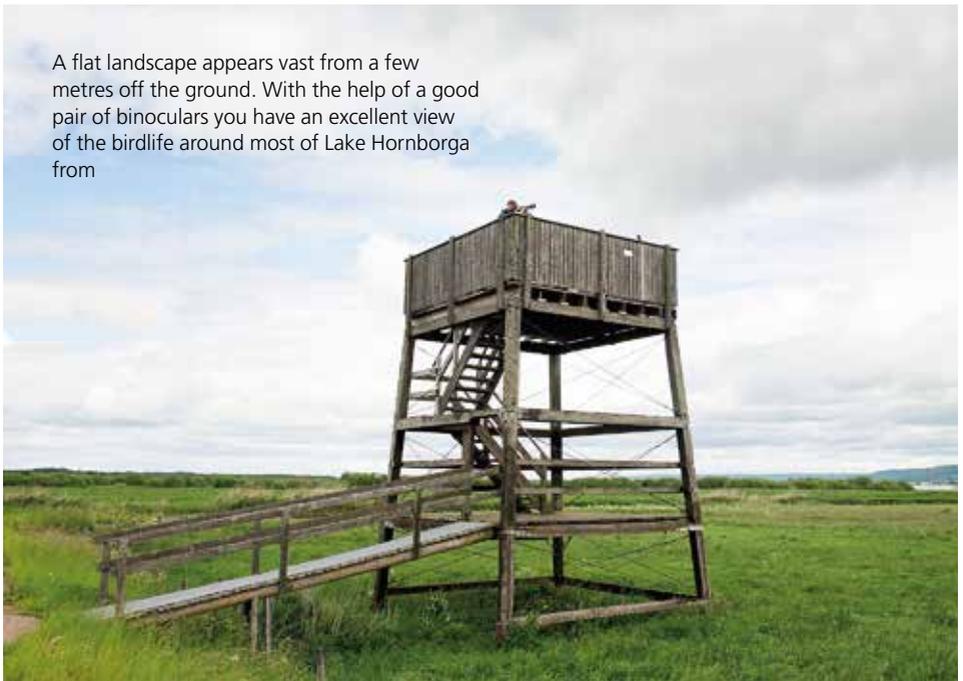
 **Wildlife:** White-tailed eagle, great reed warbler and black-necked grebe

 **Picnic spot:** At the top of the tower.

 **Getting there:** Road 184 from Skara to Falköping. Turn off in the direction of Utloppet. After driving 5.8 km on a gravel road you reach a car park. It is the starting point of an orange-marked 1.3 km trail to Utloppet and back. Public transport: Bus no. 203 (Skara-Falköping) stops at "Trestena". Follow signs for "Hornborgasjöns utlopp" (approx. 7 km one way).



A flat landscape appears vast from a few metres off the ground. With the help of a good pair of binoculars you have an excellent view of the birdlife around most of Lake Hornborga from



Rösjö Marsh

A vast and inaccessible moonscape

Rösjö Marsh is the largest wetland in Skaraborg County and a vast and solitary wilderness. It is rather hard to access, but from the point of view of the birds, it is conveniently situated only a few kilometres southwest of Lake Hornborga.

There is an unwelcoming approach to Rösjö Marsh from Skara as you need to negotiate many kilometres of unprepared forest roads, many of which are blocked by road barriers. If you really do prefer solitude, it is well worth the effort to persevere and make your way through the cultivated forest until the ground feels soft underfoot and you can smell the marsh myrtle. Soon, the vast expanses of marshland open up before you with its straggly pines and birches anchored in tufts of grass. Looking towards the expanding horizon it feels as if you are on a distant moon. In order to really get the feeling of walking on the moon, you need to consult an aerial photograph and look for open ground. Most of the forest around Rösjö Marsh has been heavily farmed, and large expanses have been drained to promote growth, especially in the south where the forest is dense.

Only a small part of Rösjö Marsh is in Skara Municipality, the rest lies within the boundaries of Vara and Falköping. For a more pleasant approach, you need to arrive from the direction of Vara and park at Bastöna heritage museum, a grey timbered farm that remains unchanged since it was built in 1860. From there you can follow a well-trodden trail leading to a deserted cottage with enormous lime trees and an orchard. The path continues unmarked towards the marsh. Parts of it are hard to make out, so it's a good idea



"Marsh gold" – cloudberryes.

to bring along a reliable map or a GPS. The more adventurous can do a five-kilometre walk around Lake Rösjö.

Because Rösjö Marsh is so hard to get to for humans, it is popular with birds that prefer peace and quiet. Many species normally associated with Sweden's mountainous north breed here. These include golden plover, wood sandpiper and curlew. It is also popular in summer with cranes and whooper swans that come to pause on the islands in the marsh. But then they are less likely to show off than in spring, so they are harder to spot.

Unlike mute swans, who are found on lakes, marshland is the habitat of whooper swans. They find peace and quiet here at Rösjö Marsh.

 **Don't miss:** Waterproof footwear if you intend to visit the best parts. If you spend the night here in April, you will hear the sound of displaying grouse.

 **Wildlife:** Golden plover, curlew, cloudberrries, wild rosemary.

 **Getting there:** If you are heading for the Skara end of the marsh, turn off the road at Arentorp and drive through the forest. You have to be prepared to walk the last few kilometres on foot. The Långöna road, which looks good on the map, has a road barrier about three km from the lake. The easiest access is from the direction of Vara in the south-west where you can park at Bastöna heritage farm. You can also approach from the south and turn off towards Ryd.

Freedom to roam

Thanks to the unique "Everyman's Right" (Allemansrätten), everyone is free to enjoy the full extent of the Swedish nature and feel at home. But it is a freedom that comes with responsibility. We may not harm animals or Mother Nature, and we must be considerate towards landowners and other people.

The Everyman's Right allows us to:

- Make a fire on ground that will not be damaged as a consequence, except when a general fire ban is in effect
- Pitch a tent for a few nights, if not too close to inhabited dwellings
- Horseback and bike riding on trails and ground that is not damaged, and is not part of private home property
- Pick berries, mushrooms, and flowers, but not break branches or pick protected plants
- Drive on private roads that are not restricted for motor vehicles
- Bring a dog, preferably on a lead. In the period March 1-August 20, a lead is compulsory.

You can find out more about allemansrätten on www.naturvardsverket.se.

Special rules apply within natural reserves. You may e.g. only be allowed to build fires at designated barbecue areas, or there may be a ban on horseriding or biking. Each reserve has its own rules which can be found on the County Council web site or on signs posted at the reserves.



Walks & Tours

Walking

Skara has around 150 km of walking and running trails, suitable for anything from a day out with a picnic to a week of hiking.

Follow the Pilgrim's Way

The Pilgrim's way is a meeting place of history, culture, nature – and you. Skaraborg County has more than 500 km of such trails, all leading toward the grave of Saint Olaf in Trondheim, Norway. Since a few years, these trails have been given the status of European Cultural Routes, just like the famous Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Route.

Skara is a hub where several trails meet. The Tourist Office sells various guidebooks describing the nature and culture along the trails, and you can also get the Pilgrim Pass- which is free – here. A classic walk is from Gudhem to Varnhem. The trail varies between narrow forest paths to following the trunk roads.

Around Billingen

The Billingen Trail starts from Lake Simsjön on the outskirts of Skövde. It climbs up to the plateau on top of Mount Billingen, then descends through pastures and deciduous forest. After heading north for about 40 km, it joins the trails of Valle, where you can continue southward to Varnhem. You can also choose to return to Skövde via S:t Elin's Trail. All in all, the walk around Mount Billingen is about 100 km.

Around Lake Flämsjön

The trail around the lake is approx. 9 km. Park at Flämslätt, along the road Öglunda-Eggby, or north of Eggby. At Lake Acksjön, you will pass by the Remningstorp Arboretum, an exciting and well-signed collection of trees from the northern hemisphere. A short stretch east of Lake Flämsjön is not signposted, but you can still easily find your way along the roads and paths.



The Tempelbacka Trail

From Skara City Centre, you can head straight out into historical cultural landscapes. The recently renovated 2-km Tempelbacka Trail starts at Götala and ends at Stenum. Tempelbacka features some ancient monuments, as according to legend, the "Thing of all Goths" was held here. This may have been a place of worship long before the city of Skara was founded and the Cathedral was built. Along the trail are many historical sights and oak copses.

Running Trails

The Healthy Trail is an 8 km running trail around Skara. There is also a 4.5 km detour around the neighbourhood of Skaraberg. You can obtain a map from the Tourist Office, or download one from the web. Be sure to check out the connecting trails of Tempelbacka and Petersburg. More running trails are available in Skaraberg, Axvall, and Istrum.

At Lake Hornborga

Several shorter trails run along the shores of Lake Hornborga, through the cultural landscape. A good place to start is the Naturum Visitors Centre, where you can get maps and information. Several themed walks start from here between April and September.

Walking in Valle

On the north face of Mount Billingen, the Ice Age has left behind the stunningly beautiful Valle region, an area of lakes and a gently rolling kame landscape. 60 km of clearly marked walking trails criss-cross the area, passing through pastures and deciduous forest.

The Vandra i Valle-map charts all the trails. It is available from the Tourist Office.

Green surprises

Cherry blossom-white fairy tale hills, vertical cliff faces and mysterious rivulets ... there is a lot more than cranes to look out for in Skara Municipality. This guide will lead you to 10 of the best destinations in verdant Skara. Enjoy!

SKARA

