

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.