

REPORT FROM SCANDINAVIA – NO. 9

Location, Climate Yield Odd Effects In Scandinavia Zone

(This is the ninth in a series of articles by Vincent H. Malmstrom. Ishpeming. Recipient of a, Fulbright scholarship, he is spending the year in travel and research in northern Europe. -Ed.)

BY VINCENT H. MALMSTROM

OSLO, May 5-In writing to you about Scandinavia, I have thus far neglected to mention a pair of factors which make it a unique region -- its location and its climate. Though most Americans are aware that Scandinavia is located in northern Europe and that since it is famous for such things as winter sports it must be cold, these two facts are about as general as the impressions the average Lower Peninsular seems to have of the Upper Peninsula. Just as we spend considerable time in explaining our friends in the Lower Peninsula that there are few if any Eskimos resident in the U. P., I think it might be well to spend a little time in disproving the myth that polar bears walk down the streets of Oslo or even Tromsø, a thousand miles farther north.

One of the first things that startles an American when he looks at a map of Europe is the northerly location of the whole sub-continent. He sees that Madrid, for example, is just as far north as Peoria, Illinois, that Chicago lies on the same parallel as Rome, Italy and that we in the Upper Peninsula, though being near the northern edge of the United States, are no farther north than Geneva, Switzerland or Milano, Italy.

It seems unbelievable that if Paris were moved into the New World at its same latitude it would rest on the northern shore of Lake Superior or that London, would be located on James Bay (the southern end of Hudson Bay) in Canada. And though we have already run out of most civilization at this latitude in our part of the world, we have not even reached the southernmost borders of Scandinavia in Europe. Incredible as it may seem, the most southerly point in Denmark is just as far north as the southern tip of the Alaskan Panhandle. All of Norway is north of Juneau, Alaska, while Finland occupies in Europe a place almost directly comparable to that of the Yukon Territory in northern Canada. Under these circumstances then: why aren't moose roaming the streets of the French capital as well as polar bears promenading through Oslo or Helsinki? The answer, of course, is the difference in climate.

Your seventh grade geography book gives you only part of the answer when it attributes the mildness of the climate of Europe to the Gulf Stream, however. It is true enough that this warm ocean current originating in the Gulf of Mexico does have an appreciable affect on Europe's climate, but of even greater significance are the prevailing south-westerly winds which carry warm air in over the European continent. Just how great an influence these factors have on the Scandinavian climate can be demonstrated by a few figures. In Oslo for example, the average January temperature is 25 degrees F., as

compared to 13 degrees in Ishpeming. In the Lofoten Islands that lie north of the Arctic Circle, the winter temperatures are more than 40 degrees warmer than the average for that latitude and even Tromsø at 70 degrees N. has a winter that is no colder than that of Oslo. In the Norwegian capital it rarely gets below -2 degrees and the coldest ever recorded here has not been lower than -16 degrees. Even more amazing is the fact that a coastal station near Norway's northern tip has never recorded a temperature below minus 4 degrees, while at Point Barrow, Alaska in the same latitude the average extreme is minus 50 degrees. Though the mildness of Norway's climate is surprising, even Sweden and Finland experience winter temperatures that are generally less severe than those which the average Upper Peninsulan has learned to expect.

Light Variation

If the mildness of the Scandinavian climate makes it seem temperate by comparison with our own, there is one other aspect of it that will not fail to impress the average Upper Peninsulan. This is the seasonal variation in light. For one who has not oneself experienced this phenomenon, it is difficult to imagine how great these extremes are from winter to summer at this latitude. We have dark winters and long summer twilight in the Upper Peninsula, but when we compare the fluctuations of light at our latitude with those which mark the annual parade of the seasons here in Scandinavia, we realize how relatively uniform they are even in northern Michigan. Let me demonstrate by a few first-hand observations made here in Norway, remembering of course that the same things are true for Sweden, and Finland.

When I arrived in Norway it was midsummer and the sun had reached the northernmost limit of its apparent annual migration from tropic to tropic. In the latitude of Oslo this meant that the sun was above the horizon for 19 hours on that day and that bright twilight lasted another 3-1/2 hours. The sun did not set until 9:30 in the evening and not until 11:15 did it finally get dark. In fact, I saw little tots out playing in the streets at 11 at "night," looking as if they had enough pep to play another 19 hours.

The "night" didn't last very long, however, for about 12:45 the first rosy glow of the rising sun was seen on the northeastern horizon and by 2:30 the sun was up in all its radiant splendor. It was all an adult could do to force himself to go to bed, much less the children who resented being sent to bed while the "sun was still shining." And once in bed, it was all you could do to stay there, for only if you had dark window shades or pulled the covers over your head could you manage to get to sleep. The only thing that kept it from being a relatively sleepless summer was the large amount of cloudy weather which tended to make it somewhat darker. In fact, the most dangerous consequences of this prolonged light are those induced by a refusal to rest adequately, so one of the first things a visitor from the temperate zone must learn is how to go to bed while the sun is shining. Time loses its meaning at this latitude, and the person who normally begins and ends his day with the sun must govern his activities by his watch instead of by old Sol. If these things are true in the latitude of Oslo, they are even more applicable in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, where the sun does not go below the horizon from the middle of May until the end of July.

Nearly Perpetual Darkness

If the Scandinavian summer is marked by almost continual daylight, then the Scandinavian winter is equally distinguished by its nearly perpetual darkness. What has been an almost irritating brightness during the summer now changes to the shadowy gloom of a never-ending night. Whereas you felt a great zest and exuberance at midsummer, by Christmas time it has deteriorated into a rather dreary listlessness. In the latitude of Oslo the sun does not get above the horizon for more than 5 and 1/2 hours, while bright twilight lengthens the day by just over two hours more. At about 8:15 in the morning it just begins to get light and by 9:15 the sun creeps above the horizon in the far south. At 2:45 the sun already is setting and by 3:45 it is once more pitch dark. The same clouds that gave you a welcome respite from the summer sunlight now steal what few hours of light and warmth the sun could give you, and you curse them. Darkness seems eternal. Once again the ones who react most directly are the little children, for they often fall asleep in school or while eating *middag* (the large Norwegian meal of the day, usually eaten between 3 and 4 in the afternoon). But the grown-ups do not escape its influence either, for it is often rather difficult to roll out of bed and go to work in pitch darkness. And it is just as dark when you're ready to go home again. Time once more has lost its meaning and after stumbling around in half light for a month or two you begin to feel like a sleep-walker. Such darkness may at first hand seem depressing, and indeed it well can be. But in the age of electricity, at least part of the edge has been taken off of this depression. Electric lights burn all day, and though they are a feeble attempt to replace the cheer of sunlight, they do make life possible. What these northern countries must have been like before electricity I will leave to your imagination.

If I have made Scandinavia sound like a region of extremes, then I feel that I have given you the correct impression of its seasonal changes. On the other hand, I have not meant to give my readers the idea that this state of affairs is in the least abnormal. It may seem so to those of us who have spent most of our life near 45 degrees latitude, but it is just as normal in its way as are the 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness that occur every day in the year on the Equator. It's something you get accustomed to or perhaps I should say resigned to, in a year or so. Nature seems to have its same cyclical rhythm above latitude 60 degrees as it does at the Equator or latitude 45 degrees. Scandinavia has no more nor no less sunlight than any other region of the world -- the only thing is that it comes all at the same time!

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