

**Linnaeus in Gotland *From the Diary at the Linnean Society, London to present day Gotland***  
by Marita Jonsson with photography by Marita and Helga Jonsson

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This lovely book takes a simple idea; Linnaeus travelled in Gotland in 1741, so 2007 his tercentenary year was a good opportunity to update the diary. Marita Jonsson lives on Gotland, loves the island and has written much about it; she was the obvious person to repeat the journey and comment on the changes. She was able to visit the places he visited on the days he visited them during the years 2005 and 2006. One has to remember that 11 days were added to the calendar in 1753 so his arrival on 22 June is now 3 July.

The book is laid out in a straightforward fashion; Linnaeus's diary entries on one page followed by Marita Jonsson's diary entries opposite, noting building materials and styles, interesting ways of life and the plants, animals and minerals he found. There are beautiful photographs on every page relating to the places he visited and the plants he found. Unfortunately some of the plant captions are wrong or missing, but this is no real problem.

Sweden had been impoverished by long wars and had only recently regained Gotland from Denmark. The Estates of the Realm were keen on economic recovery and finding new natural resources. Linnaeus had suffered poverty as a child in Småland and understood the importance of this.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was also the time of the Enlightenment and an interest in philosophy and science. Linnaeus had recently been appointed Professor of Medicine and Botany in Uppsala and president of the newly formed Royal Academy of Sciences. He was able to get finance from the government – a daily allowance and horse transport. He was quite well known already so took with him six 'young, bright and handsome youths' who would help him write and edit his diary. They travelled at their own expense.

The party worked hard during the day to find and describe as much as possible then wrote the diary in the evening. Some of the young men wrote parts of the diary mostly from Linnaeus's dictation using their field notes. It is this diary, which is in the Linnean Society of London's collections that Eivor Cormack has translated so well. Later Linnaeus published his findings and made sure they were well disseminated. The version published in 1745 had been 'improved' to be more correct with scurrilous anecdotes removed. This is the version originally translated by Marie Åsberg, a labour of love, and published by the Linnean Society of London in 1973 and republished in 2007 by Gyllene Snittet HB of Uppsala.

The two books have a completely different readership in mind. Marita Jonsson's is for the joy of Gotland and the people who live and work there. It chronicles the changes that have taken place in the last 266 years. Those of us who went on the excursion to Gotland in 2007 have been able to compare and contrast Gotland then and now – and a most interesting experience it was. This is a book full of gorgeous pictures to remind us what a delightful place it is; also for others to get a feeling for the island and realise it is a place well worth visiting. It is a gentle travelogue for disciples of Linnaeus who want to know more about his visit to Gotland.

Marita Jonsson is regional director of Monuments and Sites for Gotland so understands the architecture and buildings well. She looks carefully at the buildings and styles which Linnaeus mentions and describes the changes that have taken place – such as church towers being built or extended after his time. She is less knowledgeable about plants but went to look for and found some of the useful ones that Linnaeus found such as woad and madder, and plants he had never seen on the mainland - scorpion senna at Torsburgen and pliant lettuce on Stora Karlsö.

Linnaeus makes long lists of plants he found and some of their uses, using a mixture of Latin and Swedish. He was beginning to develop his binomial system of nomenclature but often uses two or more Latin adjectives. The translation gives their English names or enough hints to identify them. There is a plant list at the back – but why, oh why no Latin names? Linnaeus would be disappointed; he wanted everyone of every nationality to be able to understand what plant was being discussed. Hopefully this can be added in a second edition?

Linnaeus and his party arrived in Visby on 22 June (3 July) and found most of the town in ruins. The departing Danes had destroyed almost everything. Now the visitor finds an almost perfectly restored medieval walled town, a World Heritage Site since 1995.

They were soon out of the town and travelled on horseback around the island in a clockwise circuit. They stayed in inns, rectories and farmhouses and these are described when still identifiable. They were always having trouble with the availability of horses. Marita stayed in more modern hotels and describes some interesting conversions for hotels and holiday homes; she also had the problem of modern traffic, which doubles in July and August when she was travelling.

Agriculture is still an important industry with arable lands now growing maize rather than rye and barley which Linnaeus found. The marshes have been drained but there is still some great fen sedge; Linnaeus wonders if it could be grown on the mainland as it is more durable than straw for thatching. Marita notes the lamb-houses with steep sedge roofs and limestone walls.

There are still plenty of the special Gotland sheep, but less than earlier, so the vegetation has grown up and scrub and forest have redeveloped even on the poor soils. She is quite lyrical about many of the birds she sees and hears which breed on the marshes and cliffs.

The journey ends back in Visby. Linnaeus was held up in finding a suitable yacht then bad weather – eventually he gets back to Uppsala and his new job as professor. Marita Jonsson concludes that Visby is better seen outside the main tourist season when the streets are not full of people and street cafés. The boats are more reliable these days with plenty of ferries, but she will remain and wait for autumn to visit sites at leisure.

DAPHNE FIELDING FLS

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