

Linnaeus' Oland and Gotland Journey 1741

Gyllene Snittet H.B., St Johannesgarden 23 1, SE-753 12 Uppsala, Sweden

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Although some translations of Linnaeus works into German, French and English were undertaken in the eighteenth century, the following two centuries have seen a decline in such exercises. The diary of the 1741 Oland and Gotland expedition had been translated into German and Dutch within fifty years but it wasn't until 1973 that William Stearn edited Marie Asberg's first translation into English and painstakingly researched and updated the scientific names of the flora and fauna recorded by Linnaeus.

This was published in the March and June editions of the *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* and also as a hardback book by Academic Press. Sadly this is long out of print, but, for last years' tercentenary, The Linnean Society of London in conjunction with Elina Antell's Gyllene Snittet publishing house in Uppsala undertook the production of a revised edition. This was edited by John Edmondson and is well illustrated with facsimiles of pages from the original diary (with Linnaeus' charming sketches of all manner of objects in the margins), photographs of some of the herbarium specimens and contemporary and modern maps.

In the year 1741, Linnaeus had applied for the post of Professor of Medicine at the University of Uppsala. It was while waiting to hear the result that the Swedish government commissioned him to explore and survey the natural resources of the two large Baltic islands, a trip undertaken between June 21 and August 24, 1741. He looked in particular at medicinal and economic plants and the commercial possibilities of various mineral and ores.

Only one page of Linnaeus' original "jottings" exists but it is thought that he dictated these to his party of "six young gentlemen" in the evenings of each day when a fuller account was recorded. The sheer enthusiasm with which he dealt with not only all aspects of natural history but subjects as varied as the construction of gates, local cures for illnesses, dialects, translations of runic inscriptions, how various machines worked, local architecture, the examination of a child of indeterminate sex, folklore and people's clothing must have provided an incredible experience for these young men – as it does for today's reader.

On Oland they were told of the presence of coal "somewhere in Kastlosa" and after being shown two very unlikely locations and a solitary piece which he declared "Looked English" we can imagine their amusement at the trip up the proverbial garden path! On Gotland we smile at the description of the fossil-rich beach at Kappelshamn. Linnaeus wrote, "Each stone was nothing but a coral" and added that "there was enough for every man in the world to get a cartload". He noted the series of ridges above the beach and how the fossils further inland were more weathered and assumed living material could be found in the bay but didn't have time to look himself. We sympathise with his account of the party of 15 local seal-hunters from Faro who found themselves adrift on an ice flow for two weeks. All survived and are immortalised in a painting in Faro church, all dressed in their Sunday clothes.

This charming book cannot fail to enthrall any reader.

ROSEMARY WISE FLS