

THE UNIQUE Archipelago landscape

– a legacy of archipelago farming in the past



Up to the mid-20th century the entire archipelago was used as farmland. Traces from small-scale farming remain still today. Stone fences, pollarded trees, blooming landscapes and small fields remind us of generations of labour on fields and meadows.

Older farm communities

The archipelago landscape is an area of rich cultural heritage shaped by generations of archipelago farmers. The first permanent island residents arrived during the Middle Ages and lived on farms on the largest and most fertile islands. As the number of farms grew, they organized into small villages. Fishing and hunting was the main livelihood for island inhabitants, but forestry and farming have also been important. It was difficult to find fertile, arable land, especially in the outer regions of the archipelago. Here, cattle farming was important for self-provision.

The large illustration below shows how people in the archipelago supported themselves in the past. *The numbers in the text refer to the numbers in the illustration.*

1 Subsistence farming

Traditional archipelago farm fields were small and were located in valleys and dells. The farmers used simple tools and draught animals such as oxen and horses.

For the most part they grew rye, barley and oats, as well as turnips and later on potatoes. The food produced just barely provided for their household needs. They also made use of hazelnuts and fibre from linden bast. These resources were carefully divided among the villages in the archipelago.

Remnants of old fields now often used as pastureland are found on the larger islands of the inner archipelago. Abandoned, cultivated plots that have been cleared of rocks can be found on smaller islands. The old fields are often surrounded by rock fences, which kept the livestock away from the crops.



2 Outlying lands = grazing grounds

The animals were extremely important for the archipelago inhabitants. From cows, sheep and horses they acquired milk,

meat, leather, wool and help pulling carts and ploughs. The farm animals also contributed manure for the fields.

During the summer, the animals grazed on the outlying land. The outlying land comprised all of the land located farther out from the enclosed fields and meadows. The outlying land was often jointly owned and primarily covered with trees. During the 19th century, when archipelago farming was at its peak, we would find grazing animals on just about every island. The transportation of the animals in flat-bottomed boats was challenging. Sometimes the animals even had to swim between the islands.

The archipelago's open mixed-forests with grassy glades are a living legacy of a time when grazed woodlands were common throughout the country.



3 Winter fodder from meadows

Farm animals were kept inside during the winter. The more animals one could stable, the more manure one could collect; and the more fertilizer one had, the better was the harvest. However, one needed a great deal of fodder to keep the animals alive through the winter. The animals were fed primarily hay during the winter. The hay was harvested from wooded meadows and coastal meadows, as well as from small rocky islets and clumps of reeds. The area covered by meadowland was much greater than the area covered by fields during this period.

They used simple tools for haymaking, and it was a very labour-intensive task. Men and women used scythes and sickles to cut the grass, and then they raked up the grass afterwards. Young and old helped gather the hay, which was then dried on racks before it was carted home to the farm.



Continuation from section 3. Winter fodder...

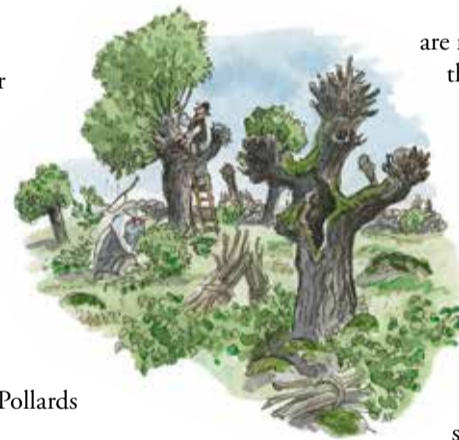
In order to insure a good harvest, farmers took care of the meadows. During the winter months they cleared the meadows of brushwood, and in the spring, a special spring-cleaning of the meadows was done. This was the time for raking and burning leaves and fallen twigs and branches so that the litter would not prevent growth of the meadow's grasses and herbs.

The hay harvested from the reeds and coastal meadows was important for the farm animals' survival over the long winters. In order to increase the harvest along the shores they used the nutrients from the sea. Through hand-dug canal systems they led water out onto the shore meadows. This also helped pike spawning and contributed to better fishing.

4 Pollarding provided leaf-fodder

Animals were also given leaves as winter fodder. Cutting branches and twigs from ashes, linden and other leafy trees is called pollarding. The leaf-fodder was an appreciated and nutrient-rich complement to the hay. During dry years when the hay harvest was poor, leaf-fodder from trees helped the animals survive the winter.

On many archipelago islands one can still see old, pollarded deciduous trees. Pollards



are recognized by their typical knotty shape and by all their branches growing from the same place on the trunk.

5 Firewood and timber for household use

Timber from the forest was used for buildings, fences, boats and other structures. Firewood was also collected. Work in the forest primarily took place during the winter months when farming did not require as much work. The islander's small-scale forestry and ancient grazed woodlands have shaped these light, open woodlands that can still be enjoyed today in many places.

Archipelago life in the past

The numbers in the illustration refer to the numbers in the text.



Today's archipelago landscape

The sound of bleating sheep and the shrill call of a green woodpecker. A hornet buzzing by on route to its nest in an old oak tree. The ground covered in a dazzling floral splendour. A diversity that exists here thanks to humans and grazing animals.

Cultural landscape rich in species

The archipelago's inner and central regions reveal a special landscape shaped by humans over the centuries. A small-scale cultural landscape is found here, with grazed woodlands and pastures as well as small fields and meadows. The varied landscape provides good conditions for biodiversity. The regular customary use of the land and the relatively nutrient-poor soil favour competitively weaker species and create one of the most species-rich plant communities on earth.

The many plant species also attract a variety of butterflies, beetles and other insects, which in turn become food for birds.

Grazed woodlands

Cattle and sheep graze not only on the pastures, but also in the forest. Forestry is small-scale and people have long collected firewood and lumber from the forest for household use. Together with grazing animals, this has created light, open forests. The woodlands are very species-rich and favour herbaceous plants, fungi, insects and many birds.

Diversity recreated

Many small farms in the archipelago have shut down due to diminished profitability and the number of grazing animals has declined. The result is overgrown woodlands and pastures, and a loss of biodiversity.

To preserve this unique natural and cultural landscape, the brushwood and young trees need to be cleared. This lets in more sunlight and creates forests with open areas as well as areas of denser forest. On many islands, grazing is being reintroduced and animals are transported between the islands or from the mainland.

Jacks-of-all-trades

Traditionally, the archipelago's inhabitants have been jacks-of-all-trades and have pursued forestry and farming in addition to their main source of income, which has often been fishing. Having many different options is still quite important. Today, maintaining the archipelago's unique cultural landscape and tourism are both significant activities.

This is a sign placed in many of the areas included in the LIFE Coast Benefit project. The sign tells about today's archipelago landscape.

The Life Coast Benefit project involves conservation measures on the coast and in the archipelago within three counties – Södermanland, Östergötland and Kalmar. The conservation efforts have been carried out in Natura 2000 areas, which is a network of EU's species and nature sites most worthy of protection. The project was carried out from 2013 to 2019.



Bloody Crane's-bill
Geranium sanguineum

Nothern Wheatear
Oenanthe oenanthe

Six-Spot Brunet
Zygaena filipendulae

Green Rose chafer
Cetonia aurata

Heather
Calluna vulgaris

Green Woodpecker
Picus viridis

Lesser Butterfly-orchid
Platanthera bifolia

Starling
Sturnus vulgaris

Dotted Stem bolete
Neoboletus luridiformis

Yellowhammer, male
Emberiza citrinella

European Hornet
Vespa crabro

Pyramidal Bugle
Ajuga pyramidalis

Mountain Everlasting
Antennaria dioica

Dropwort
Filipendula vulgaris

Yellowhammer, female
Emberiza citrinella

Moonwort
Botrychium lunaria

White Swallow-wort
Vincetoxicum hirundinaria

Elder-flowered orchid
Dactylorhiza latifolia

Spotted Cat's-ear
Hypochaeris maculata

Common Milkwort
Polygala vulgaris

Beaked Earthstar
Geastrum pectinatum

Common Rock-rose
Helianthemum nummularium



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