



Foto: Jesper Anhedé

Town walk through Hjo



Town walk through Hjo - a wooden town on the shore of Lake Vättern

Welcome to your town walk through Hjo. During the walk, you will have the chance to discover our beautiful wooden town, at your own pace.

At each stop, you will learn more about Hjo's history, spanning over 600 years. Your walk will take you along charming cobbled streets, past leafy gardens and verandas showcasing their expert carpentry.

A warm welcome to Hjo - the wooden town on Lake Vättern!

- A Ånabacken
- B Hantverksgatan
- C Sjögatan
- D Skolbryggan
- E Torget 1
- F Torget 2
- G Hamngatan
- H Hamngatan, Estridplatsen
- I Hamngatan, Norrbro
- J Hertig Johans brygga
- K Hamnen
- L Bellevueterrassen
- M Floragatan





Ånabacken

Here, at the start of Ånabacken, we're standing in the middle of the 'Hjoåns dalgång' [Hjo river valley nature reserve] – a 2.5 km long walking route that divides the town into a northern and southern section. A unique stretch of wilderness in the middle of a town. The river and its valley have been hugely significant to the town's development through the centuries.

Running water means power, and small industries such as forges, tappers and mills had established a presence here in the valley very early on.

The Hjo river is also a key spawning site for salmon trout and grayling, and on dark autumn evenings you can go on a trout safari to follow the playful fish. The river splits here at the bridges, and a southern branch runs into the park-like garden that the bath spa doctor Wilhelm Baggstedt commissioned at the end of the 1870s. This was at the same time as the town park and spa resort were designed, and Baggstedt, a wealthy man, also wanted a small park created on his extensive land.

Johan Joseph Sterneman was the German landscape architect who designed both the park and the garden. It became a real fairytale garden - the man-made islands still exist, but the beautiful stone bridges were demolished and the footpaths have long since been reclaimed by nature. The small pavilion, with all its carvings, does still stand proudly on one of the islands. Slightly further up the hill are the Baggstedt garden's long mews with farmhouse, carriage house, hayloft and outhouse.



Hantverksgatan

In the early 1800s there was no industry to speak of, but there were many skilled craftsmen. The majority of the craftsmen were to the west of the square, except the dyers and tanners who needed access to ample amounts of water and therefore naturally chose the lake shore or the banks of the Hjo river for their business.

In 1805 the town had 43 masters in 18 different crafts: cordwainers, ropemakers, pewterers and coppersmiths, to name a few - and it was in the area around this little, picturesque, cobbled street, that several of these craftsmen worked. The beautiful small street is nevertheless strangely closed: no doors open on to the road, and the entrance is round the back! In the rectory garden, on the east side of the street, was where the wedding photo was taken of the poet and academy member Bo Bergman when in 1905 he married the priest's daughter, Hildegard. Bo Bergman had a somewhat fractured relationship with the idyllic Hjo, and long after, wrote a poem that begins:

'There was a little, little town,
with a little river running through it all,
and in the little town
all the words were so big
and all the people so small.'

Hildegard may have been pretty, but she could hardly measure up to 'beautiful Anna' in Kakelugnsmakaregården!

Anna was the daughter of the tiled stove maker Hjalmar Hallberg and according to several sources, was the 1890's sweetest girl in Hjo!

The farmhouse on the corner of Torggatan is also a fine example of the hand-planed panels that have been preserved on so many facades here in the wooden town of Hjo.

But what about Anna? Well, she left the town and all her admirers to marry a book printer in Skara!

If you turn the corner at the very bottom of the street, you'll find a typical craftsman's building, behind a small, white plastered house with rambling roses. This is where Alfred Falk began working sheet metal in 1911 and today, over 100 years later, it still looks pretty much as it has always done.

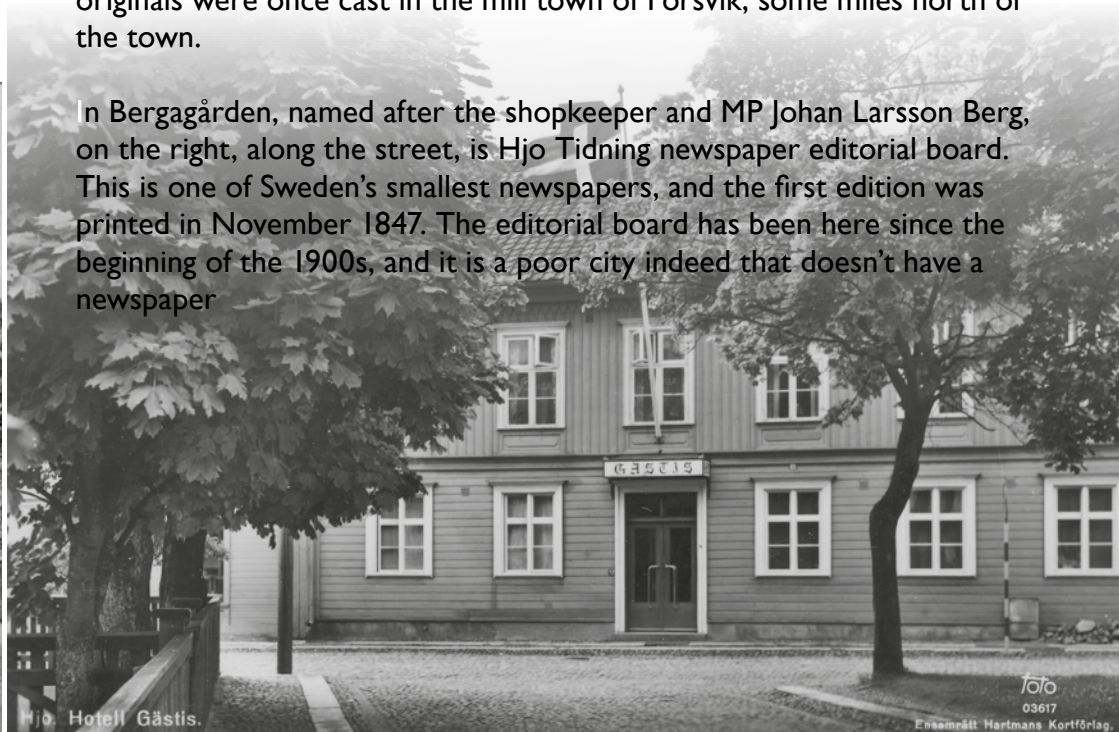


Sjögatan

All of Sjögatan is a fantastic example of beautiful, preserved wooden panelling work. On the right-hand side, by Jacobsparken is the old 'Gästis' guest house. This is where restaurant keeper August Andersson lived from the beginning of the 1880s. Back then it was not just a guest house, but also a stables, staging post and meeting place for merchants and craftsmen. Gästis was in business as a restaurant as late as the 1990s.

One of August's successors was sued for serving beer with his veal cutlets, something that he was not permitted to do. The restaurant keeper did not deny the charge, but still wanted it on record that it was not veal cutlets but pork cutlets! This gave rise to the local saying: "I say, it was pork cutlets, I say". Sjögatan's beautiful iron lamps are new, but the originals were once cast in the mill town of Forsvik, some miles north of the town.

In Bergagården, named after the shopkeeper and MP Johan Larsson Berg, on the right, along the street, is Hjo Tidning newspaper editorial board. This is one of Sweden's smallest newspapers, and the first edition was printed in November 1847. The editorial board has been here since the beginning of the 1900s, and it is a poor city indeed that doesn't have a newspaper



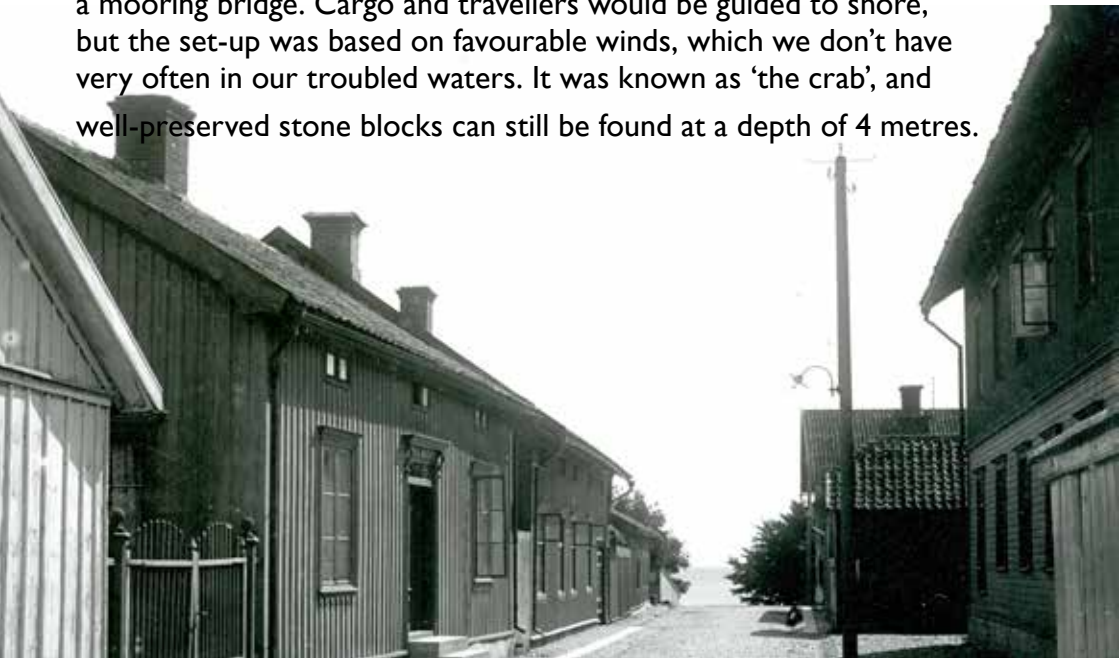


Skolbryggan

Here at Skolbryggan is where Sjögatan begins. Or ends, if you prefer. In the mid 1800s there was a school and schoolyard on the site to the south; hence the name 'skolbryggan', or 'school bridge'.

Over the years, this bridge has seen textiles (household and haberdashery items), tablecloths and bedlinen all scoured and washed by women's rough, red, chapped hands. Of course they enjoyed happy companionship, but they were also cold and weary, with aching limbs. But this wasn't the first bridge to be built here. The first harbour in Hjo with Duke Johan's bridge had quietly gone to ruin and become one with the sea. The ships and the cargo had become larger and heavier - something had to be done!

It had to be a temporary measure: a harbour bridge would be added, and 200 metres out in the lake, stone blocks would be sunk to create a mooring bridge. Cargo and travellers would be guided to shore, but the set-up was based on favourable winds, which we don't have very often in our troubled waters. It was known as 'the crab', and well-preserved stone blocks can still be found at a depth of 4 metres.



Torget I

Buildings are constructed where key routes cross. From the south is the road from the medieval town of Jönköping and the road goes to the west, through the pass in Hökensås and further on to Skövde, Varnhem and Skara. It was here, around the square and church, that the first buildings were constructed some time in the 13th century.

The name Hjo has been spelled in various ways over the centuries, such as Hio, or Hyo as it was known in the oldest preserved written document, a will from 1327. The meaning of the name is disputed, but most sources show the town getting its name from the Hjo river. Another variation is based on an old story where the initial letters of the Latin 'Hic Jacet Otium' (here rests peace) were used to form the town's name. This is a Latin exclamation attributed to an Alvastra monk who, after a stormy sea voyage, found his salvation on the Hjo shore. A romantic idea, but hardly true. It is not known exactly when Hjo received its town privileges, but in 1413 it was labelled as a town in every instance, and was named as such in Eriks av Pommern's tax ledger.



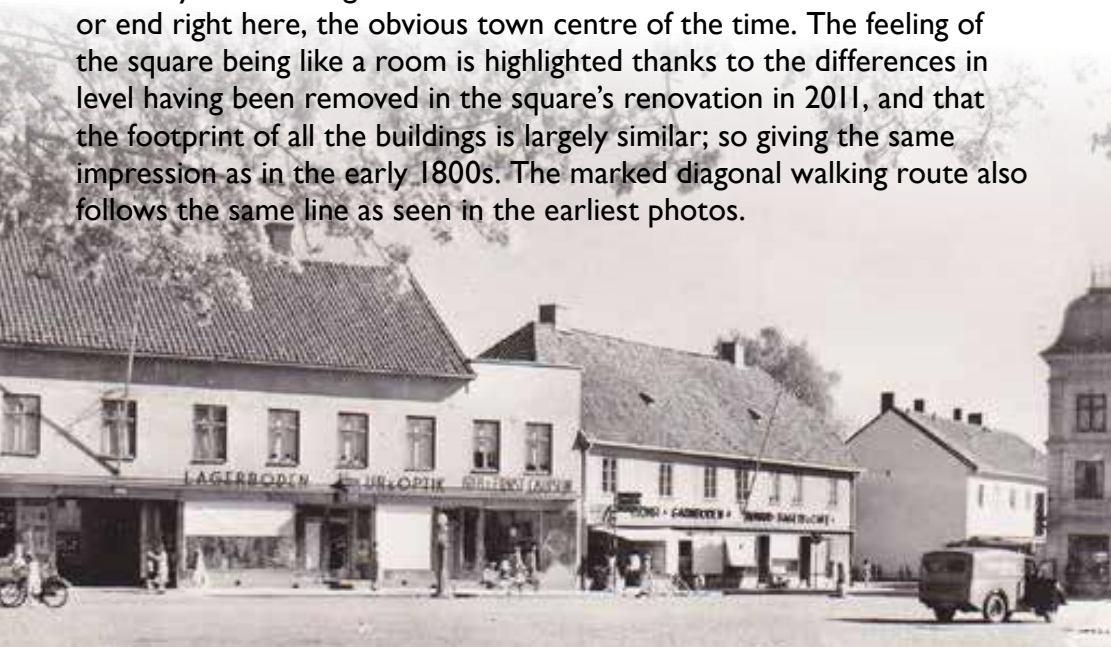


Torget 2

Fire and wooden towns have never been a great combination, but as far as we know, the town has never had any major conflagration. But it came close to it in 1794! An accidental fire in a stables quickly spread, and with the powerful southeasterly wind, the flames reached the old church with its wooden roof, along with the wooden longhouses. However, thanks to the immediate intervention of the townsfolk and the farmers and villagers from neighbouring Fågelås, the devastation was limited.

The church burned to the ground, as did neighbouring properties on Regeringsgatan and Hantverksgatan, but there is reason to believe that this saved the medieval town layout, and the same street network is largely the same nowadays.

The market square resembles a closed room, with closely-built and relatively low buildings. The old town's three main streets either start or end right here, the obvious town centre of the time. The feeling of the square being like a room is highlighted thanks to the differences in level having been removed in the square's renovation in 2011, and that the footprint of all the buildings is largely similar; so giving the same impression as in the early 1800s. The marked diagonal walking route also follows the same line as seen in the earliest photos.



Note the beautiful market square lantern. It was mothballed for many years, replaced by a tall and cold 'circular armature', but it is now back in its rightful place, spreading its gentle glow over the evening and nighttime walkers.

The old council building, where the councillors used to meet, is long since gone - but on its site we can see a later copy in granite of the compass rose from the 1696 map, intended as a meeting point – a miniature Stureplan mushroom! In the 1870s, a water fountain was set in the square, where girls and maids fetched water for their households, exchanging news and whispered gossip. The current fountain, with its beautiful 'Woman at the well' sculpture is from 1965, honouring all the water bearers who would carry water in pails and buckets in all weathers to their masters' household and their own families.

As in all medieval towns, the square was also a market place. Cart horses in front of iron-lined carts. Noisy and slippery. Young girls in hoods, with baskets under their arms. High-class women with fabulous hats and parasols. Meat and fish, bird and game, berries and cheese - everything was available for those who could afford it.



● Tavlans plats

● i Turistbyrån

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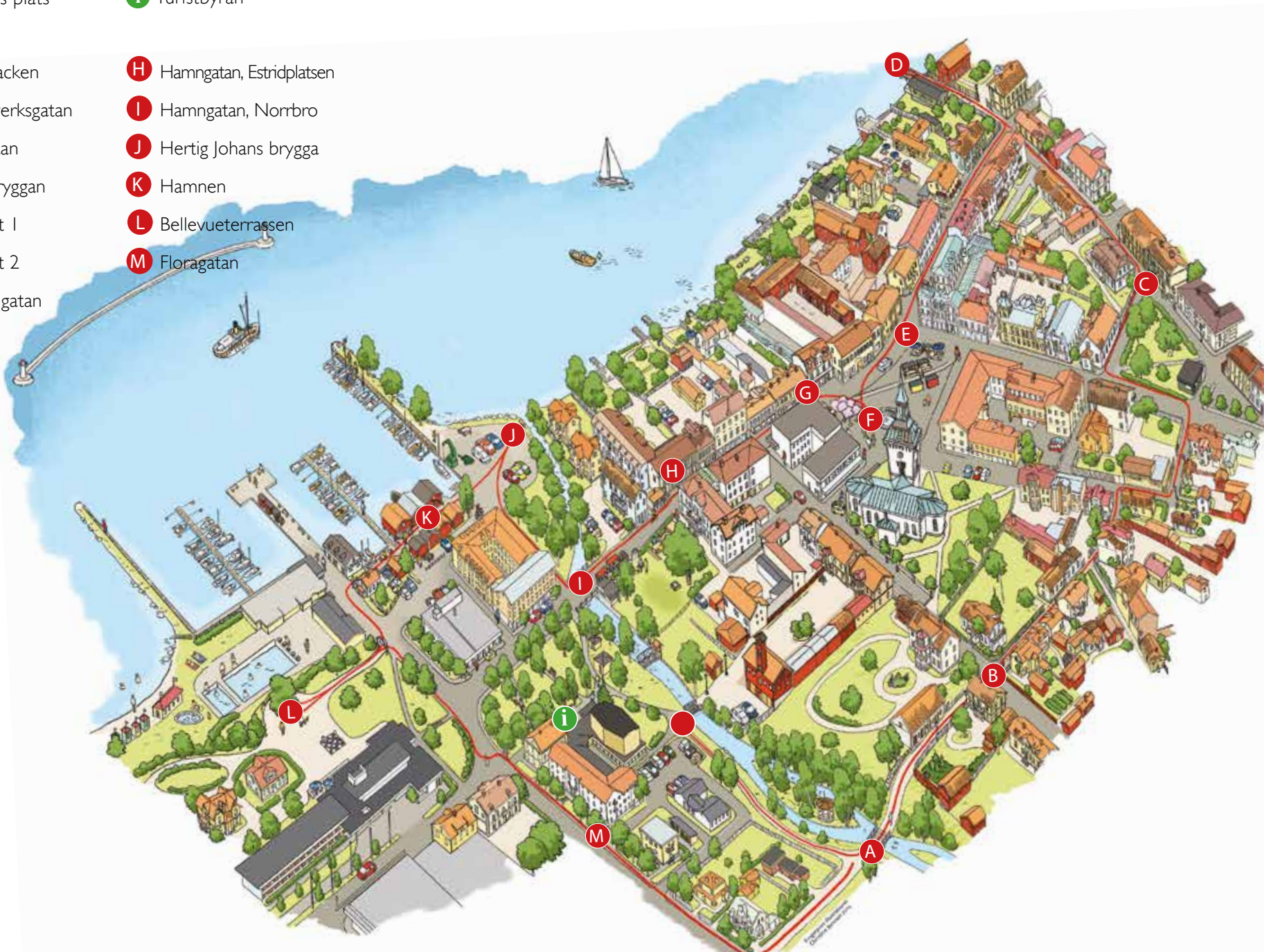
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Hamngatan, mittemot Njuta

On Hamngatan and further up towards Långgatan, were the well-placed trade and craftsmen's grounds. Wide doorways face the street, large enough for a horse and carriage to go through, and in the inner courtyards, long wooden buildings run towards the lake shore. The doorway arch is still there, but no tanneries or dyeing houses - times have changed. Towards the end of the 19th century, businesses changed character, and shops and specialist boutiques selling all sorts became a new sight in the town.



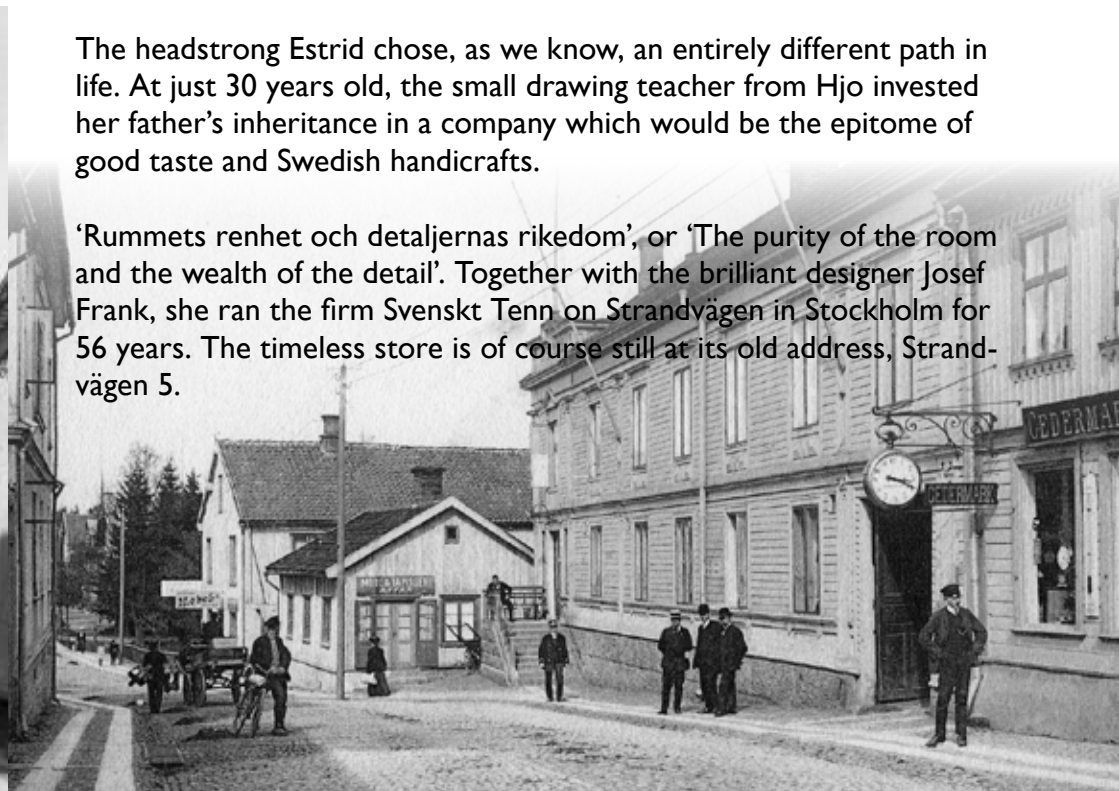
Hamngatan, Estridplatsen

By the customs house you can find Estrid Ericson's memorial site, and it's not without good reason. This was Estrid Ericson's home. Around the turn of the last century, there used to be a staircase up to the Hotell Royal, where Adolf Ericson, Estrid's father and restaurant keeper, would sit and smoke cigars. He also would wait for the arrival of the trains and steamboats, which would always have potential guests for the hotel and restaurant.

On the floor above was where the Ericson family lived, and after the father's death, the hotel business was continued by his son Bele and then by his daughter Christina.

The headstrong Estrid chose, as we know, an entirely different path in life. At just 30 years old, the small drawing teacher from Hjo invested her father's inheritance in a company which would be the epitome of good taste and Swedish handicrafts.

'Rummets renhet och detaljernas rikedom', or 'The purity of the room and the wealth of the detail'. Together with the brilliant designer Josef Frank, she ran the firm Svenskt Tenn on Strandvägen in Stockholm for 56 years. The timeless store is of course still at its old address, Strandvägen 5.





Hamngatan, Norrebro

The Hjo river, which today splits its town down the middle, used to be the boundary towards the north. If you look back in a southerly direction, you can see the small customs house jutting out.

It was built in the first half of the 18th century and has seen travelling tradesmen, craftsmen and farmers paying customs for their wares. The bridge we are now standing on, Norrebro, was the last to be made from wood, and was replaced in 1881 by a stone bridge which cost 2,000 kronor, of which 400 kronor was collected funds. A stable crossing here was an obvious necessity. A local stonemason was the contractor – he came from Långgeruder up on the hill, and was called Alex Borg.



Hertig Johans brygga

The mouth of the Hjo river is probably the place that created the conditions for our town to grow. In the early 1100s, the French brothers from the monastery of Clairvaux in France up to a cold and barren land of the north, the somewhat reluctant Geats and Swedes would be fully converted to Christianity.

Alvestra was built on the east side of the lake and Varnhem's monastery on the west side. The logistics were essential, and for seafarers, the Hjo river was a protected mooring place. Hökensås also makes a beautiful dip just here, and offers walkers an easier journey west to Varnhem and Skara.

The land route to Alvastra was thirteen miles across fairly uninhabited terrain and with a significant risk of being robbed and killed. The two miles across the unpredictable sea was therefore preferable. Hästholmen, on the Östgöta side, is the first town in medieval Sweden to have a ship in its coat of arms. It likely lost its privileges to the benefit of Hjo, and perhaps we also took over the coat of arms.

The first depiction of our coat of arms is from 1421 and in it, the ship has a Viking prow. Sjöbolanka is the name for the type of ship capable of navigating very shallow waters and the secure anchoring points on the Hjo river for monks, merchants, fishermen, entertainers and craftsmen who wanted to use them, and who had to collaborate to make a living.



As early as the 13th century, both Alvastra and the powerful House of Bjelbo in Vadstena had significant land ownership on the Västgöta side, which obviously increased the number of crossings and created greater need for anchoring sites, food and lodgings.

Duke Johan was the half brother of Sigismund, nephew of Karl IX, cousin to Gustav II Adolf and Duke of Finland and Östergötland, which included the Kåkind Hundred here on the west side and that is where our little town is.

Johan had a passion for trade and the town's development. In the early 17th century, the kindly Duke paid for a bridge at the mouth of the Hjo river so that larger vessels could arrive. Its remains are under water, but one of the bridge's oak beams has been salvaged and is displayed on the north side of the river. This spot, at the mouth of the river, is also where the westerly walking route begins, through the Hjo river valley nature reserve.

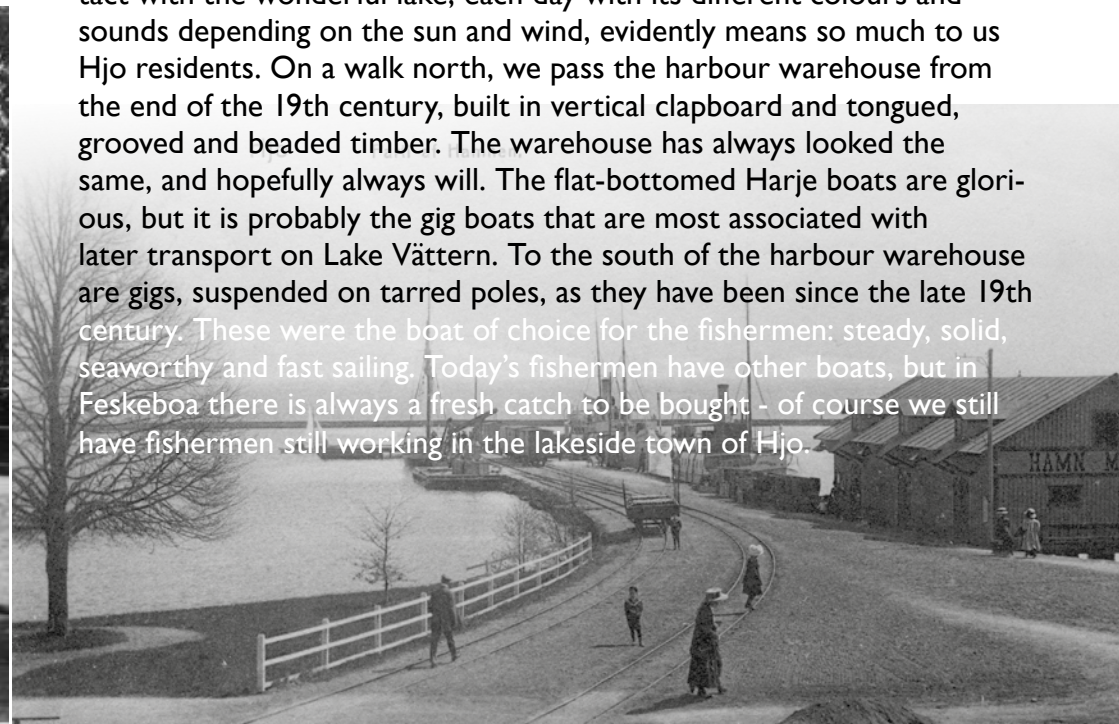


Hamnen

Water does not divide, it unites! This motto was particularly true in the Middle Ages. It was two miles to Hästholmen to the east side of the lake by water, but thirteen miles by land, over unsafe hills and riding routes.

Hjo is a maritime town which proudly has a cog ship in its coat of arms. There are not many people who are still familiar with the shipping traffic across the Vättern. In the 1960s, the steam ship Trafik made regular trips to Hästholmen and one or two ships landed in harbour. The S/S Trafik still exists, but the trips are only made in summer and the Vättern barges are no longer seen.

The harbour is still the heart and soul of the town, and just having contact with the wonderful lake, each day with its different colours and sounds depending on the sun and wind, evidently means so much to us Hjo residents. On a walk north, we pass the harbour warehouse from the end of the 19th century, built in vertical clapboard and tongued, grooved and beaded timber. The warehouse has always looked the same, and hopefully always will. The flat-bottomed Harje boats are glorious, but it is probably the gig boats that are most associated with later transport on Lake Vättern. To the south of the harbour warehouse are gigs, suspended on tarred poles, as they have been since the late 19th century. These were the boat of choice for the fishermen: steady, solid, seaworthy and fast sailing. Today's fishermen have other boats, but in Feskeboa there is always a fresh catch to be bought - of course we still have fishermen still working in the lakeside town of Hjo.





Bellevueterrassen

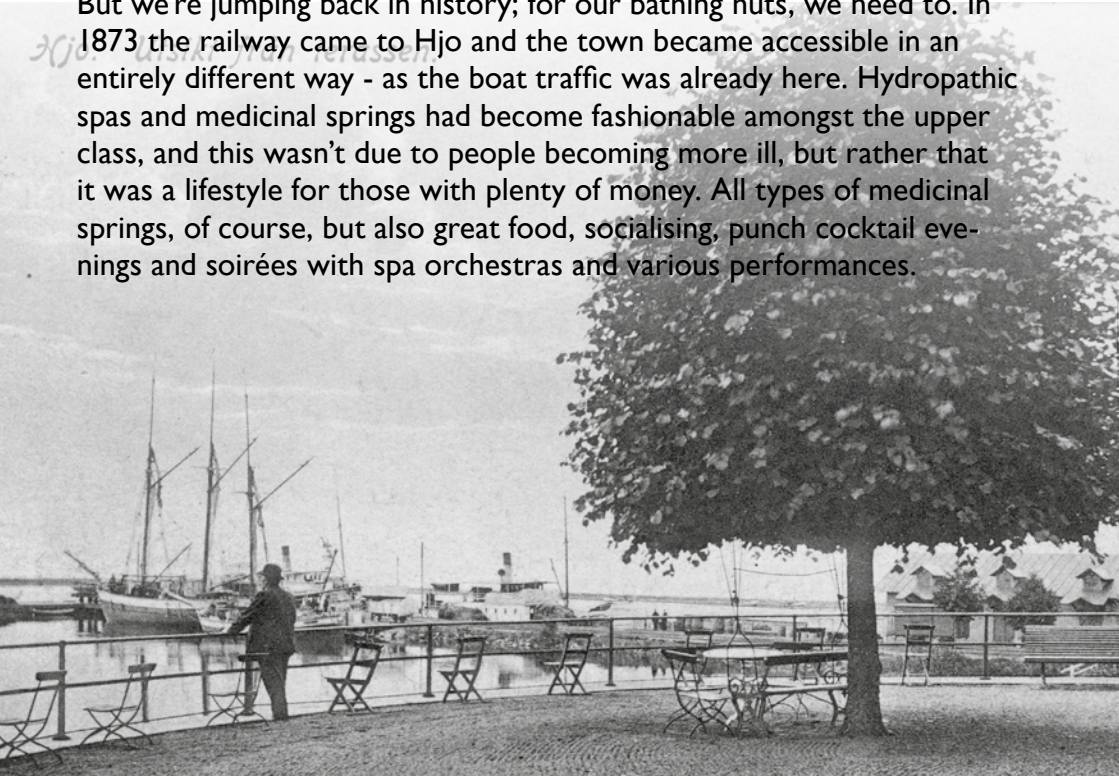
Early morning on Sunday 28 August 1932, the old restaurant and railway hotel Bellvue burned to the ground – the Hjo newspaper the following morning ran the headline ‘Fireball in the dead of night seen for miles around’. The new Bellvue hotel is behind you.

It’s been a long time, but we do still have a ‘bellevue’ – a beautiful view! Lake Vättern – the constantly changing lake with new colours and shapes every day. Omberg is never far away, and Ellen Key’s house; Strand, a small, white dot on the southern slope, far over there in Östergötland. We have the lake and harbour for our feet to walk, but also the beach and bathing huts; the town’s hallmark pride and joy.

But we’re jumping back in history; for our bathing huts, we need to. In 1873 the railway came to Hjo and the town became accessible in an entirely different way - as the boat traffic was already here. Hydropathic spas and medicinal springs had become fashionable amongst the upper class, and this wasn’t due to people becoming more ill, but rather that it was a lifestyle for those with plenty of money. All types of medicinal springs, of course, but also great food, socialising, punch cocktail evenings and soirées with spa orchestras and various performances.

Nobility and well-heeled citizens mingled; Hjo would be a famous spa town and its facilities would be in a town park on the lakeside. The company AB Hjo Vattenkuranstalt was founded in 1876 as a result. A German landscape artist was hired for the project, with ponds, planting and walking paths. A fairytale house with turrets and towers was designed to house guests, and at the centre of the grounds was the Society House with the various health spa baths and communal rooms for parties and enjoyment.

A healthy walk after the brass orchestra; simply recharging your body’s batteries - cold cuts, pickled herring, schnapps and taking a health-giving turn in the bower. The years around the turn of last century were the heyday of the spa, and it was also at this time that the beach bathing arrived, with the characteristic specially-designed small bathing huts along the beach. Not yet communal bathing; a fence divided the men from the women, boys and girls, but nevertheless it was open to everyone and not just spa guests. In the brochure from 1898, we can read how the rooms were fitted out with ‘exceptionally good beds and every room has a bell to summon the service.’ The area around Lake Vättern was also known for its nice mild climate, and the town was considered simply ‘one of Sweden’s healthiest towns, with a particularly low death rate.’ The park comes to an end in the north, at Vindarnes Udde. There is a bench for tired walkers, and it’s here that the lake is most appreciable than anywhere else along the western coast. Do take a look around Hjo town park before you continue on.





Floragatan

Floragatan, with its many Art Nouveau houses, is one of the town's main avenues. The 'New Town' was designed to the north of Hjo and building work began in the latter half of the 19th century. This is an entirely different town image than the medieval narrow alleys, cobblestones and intimate feel. Here there are wide streets and large gaps between the houses. In early photographs, before the trees had matured, the area looks rather desolate. These were new ideals and new times. The old town had become too crowded – now it was all about luxurious, modern construction. The new town plan was adopted in 1874.

For the majority of the Art Nouveau houses on Floragatan, the interior and exteriors have retained much of their original character. Here is one of Floragatan's many stunning houses. Per Forsell was director and head of Hjo brewery. In 1922 he had a house constructed with a hipped Mansard roof. His wife Elsa was the sister of Svenskt Tenn's founder, Estrid Ericson, and inside the house were many collected and preserved items to the memory of the collaboration between Estrid and the architect and designer Josef Frank.



We are now on our way down Ånabacken. To the right is Settergrenska villa from the end of the 19th century, built in panelling, so wood is the main feature here. Carl W. Settergren was one of the first town councilors and was the chairman of the council board for seven years. He was the district vet, and the house was also a veterinary surgery for almost 40 years.

The house and garden, which stretches down to the lake edge, had fallen into disrepair in the 1980s, but is now restored to a dwelling for multiple families. The water lily ponds that he created by the river are still thriving.





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