

West Sweden

Outdoor adventures on the Swedish coast



MAMMUT

WHERE:

Bohuslän - north of Gothenburg

ACTIVITY:

Hiking, mountain biking, climbing, sea kayaking

TOTAL TIME:

2-4 Days

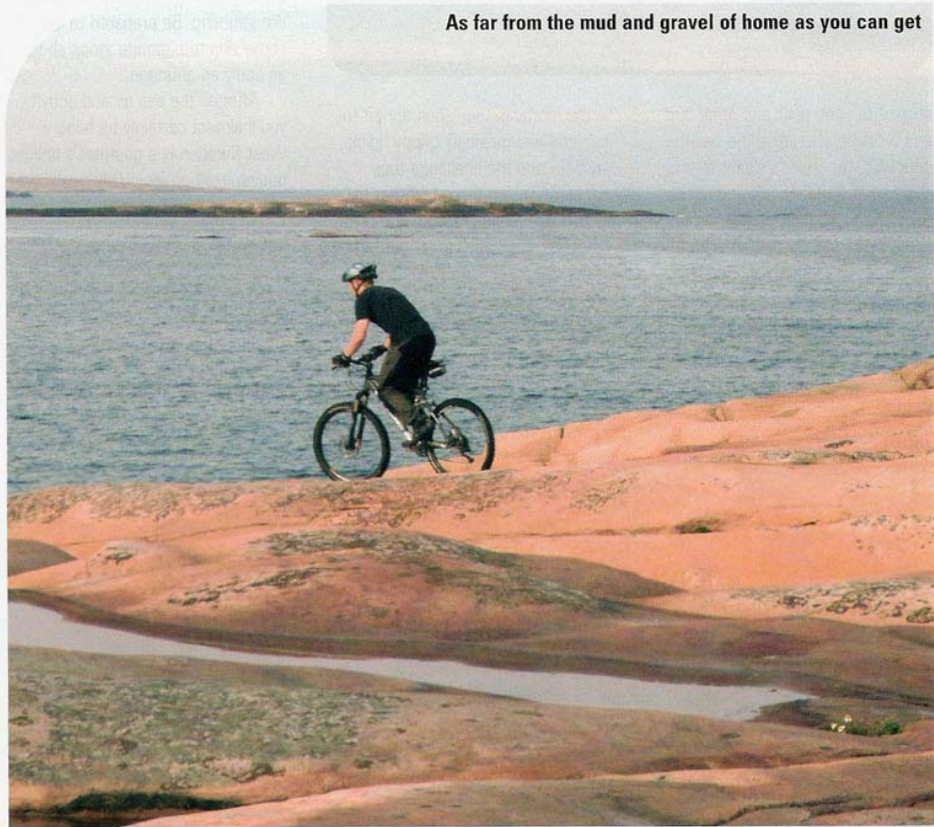
DIFFICULTY:

All Grades

LOOK OUT FOR:

- Clear coastal light
- super grippy rock
- islands
- superb seafood

As far from the mud and gravel of home as you can get



Stretching along the west coast from just north of Gothenburg right up to the Norwegian border, Bohuslän is where the Swedes go to escape the hubbub of city life. Even Ingrid Bergman had a holiday home on one of the tiny islands of the archipelago. Lara Dunn spends a long weekend finding out just what the Swedes have been keeping to themselves.



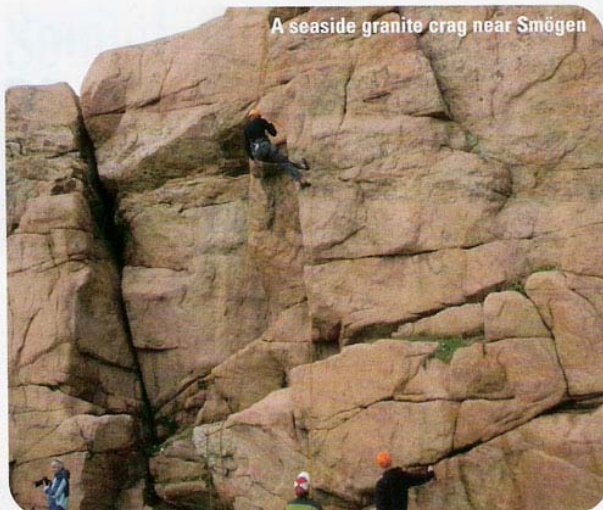
Bohuslän lacks the PR of its wilder, more ruggedly handsome big brother Lapland. Where outdoor enthusiasts the world over have travelled to the remote north of Sweden, to indulge in some of the most pristine wilderness Europe has to offer, few have spared even a second glance for the more gentle coastal regions of the west. It's not an accident though, that this area is teeming with Swedes every free moment they get.

For walkers and hikers, the Bohuslän region is a treat, with

undulating paths leading around the coastline, through native woodland and over granite hillsides, and always with stunning views of the sea beyond. The Sotenleden consists of 60km of some 20 or so marked trails, meandering around the area, and a map is available from the local tourist office. The scenery changes constantly, from beech woods to open pastures, but the tranquillity is a constant. There's also the Bohusleden, a 360km hiking trail running from Lindome in the south right up to Strömstad in the north.

This trail is broken down into stages suitable for either day hikes or longer, and is well signposted, with regular rest stops and windbreaks. Wild camping is allowed anywhere in Sweden, as long as you steer clear of houses.

The Fjällbacka archipelago, off the west coast, is made up of a vast array of tiny granite islands, and along with the intricate Bohuslän archipelago makes for world class sea kayaking. If weather conditions are favourable, then the wind battered outer islands offer the



A seaside granite crag near Smögen

chance to spot seals and other bird and wildlife, whereas if the weather gets wild, the islands closer to the shore offer a more sheltered option. For those looking for something a bit different, or a multi-day adventure, uninhabited islands in the huge Bohuslän archipelago can even be camped on. Many outfitters offer kayak hire in the area, or if you're hiring a car, take your own.

If you prefer pedal to paddle, then the coastal landscape of Bohuslän offers a truly unique mountain biking experience. Most British mountain bikers will be familiar with thick mud, rocks and gravel under wheel, but here the challenge is altogether different. Setting out from the Ramsvik Nature Reserve, it's a short jaunt to a stretch of coastline seemingly constructed from giant, smooth granite boulders. No point in looking about for the trail, these boulders ARE the trail. A little slippery first thing

in the morning, they soon dry off to become a surprisingly grippy riding surface, and the challenge then becomes linking them together to form a continuous flowing ride. With practice, and if you've not got fed up with a hard landing or gone for an impromptu dip, this is a scenic and entertaining place to ride. Other more conventional trails abound in the area too, leading through woods and over moorland, often featuring more granite boulders, cunningly hidden beneath grass and shrubs, until you slide off them or hit them that is.

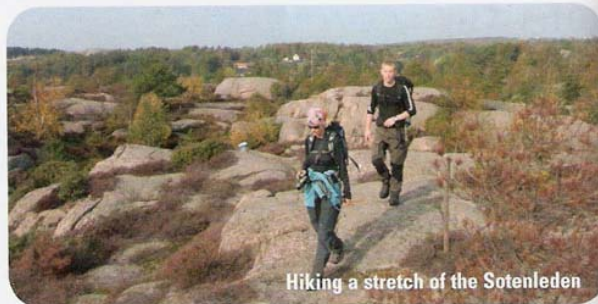
Around Smögen, home to some of the area's best seafood (especially lobster) the short limestone cliffs and broad open strands beneath are a paradise for climbers, especially those looking for single pitch routes or for top roping. The views across the open sea and islands are something to behold, and best avoided whilst belaying your partner,

or while trying a particularly challenging overhang yourself! In summer this would be an incredible place to pack a picnic, hang out on the beach and climb a bit, but even in late September the weather was balmy and pleasant and the west facing rock warm to the touch. The whole of this area north of Gothenburg is known for its superb granite climbs, encompassing beginner's single pitchers, right through to some pretty serious multi-pitch routes. Some crags are by the sea, others slightly inland, and almost all routes are based around cracks, so don't bother if you don't like jamming. Be prepared to lose some skin too, granite strips about as badly as gritstone.

After all the sea air and activity, you'll almost certainly be hungry. West Sweden is a gourmet's delight, priding itself on incredibly fresh seafood and high quality chefs and restaurants to cook and prepare it for you. Lobster from this region is known throughout the world for its quality, and come September, the whole area goes lobster mad. Prawns and wild mushrooms also feature largely on local menus. The only challenge is to balance energy expended with energy ingested.

If you've longer in the area, and it certainly merits it, then a visit to Norden's Ark is well worth the time. Calling itself a zoo, Norden's Ark is unlike any zoo you're likely to have visited, certainly in the UK. One of its primary aims is to be a breeding facility for endangered species, with great emphasis placed on the possibility of re-introduction into the wild, where appropriate. Both the physical and psychological welfare of the animals is of paramount importance, and its fascinating to see local Scandinavian wildlife, as well as the more exotic 'imports' like snow leopards and tigers. The high point for me was standing actually within the wolverine enclosure to watch these amazing creatures feed. One of the best climbing areas is near by too.

Another must see, if you've the time, are the Koster Islands. These small car free inhabited islands are as far west as you can go in Sweden, and boast the most sunshine of anywhere in the country. They are a boat journey from Strömstad and free bikes are available to get around once you're there. The Koster Islands are soon to be an integral part of Sweden's first marine national park. ■



Hiking a stretch of the Sotenleden

NEED MORE INFO?

Getting there

Gothenburg is the best choice, and both the city's airports are well served by inexpensive flights from the UK. Ryanair fly from Stansted and Glasgow to the City airport (Säve) for as little as £20, SAS fly from Heathrow to Landvetter from about £140 return, and City Airline from Birmingham and Manchester to Landvetter (from £175). City airport is closer to Bohuslän. Airport buses serve both airports and from Gothenburg's central Nils Ericson Terminalen you can catch a bus to Sotenäs/Hunnebostrand, then a taxi to Ramsvik. A hire car would give more flexibility.

The longer, greener option

Perfectly doable, but it's going to involve a lengthy stretch in a ferry to Denmark,

then on by train, or an epic Eurostar/train combo, and it won't be cheap.

Sweet dreams

The Bohuslän area is incredibly popular with the Swedish themselves so there's no shortage of accommodation. Ramsvik is a great option, kind of a cross between chalets and a youth hostel (from 450 SEK a night) open from April to end September. It's inexpensive and the views are just incredible. It's also a great base for mountain biking. There's a campsite next door too from 190SEK per night. Norderns Ark has its own hotel, with prices from 1300SEK for a double room, inclusive of zoo entry. Sweden's first floating hotel Salt & Sill has just opened at Klädesholmen. Accommodation including Ramsvik is

easily booked online at www.westsweden.com

How much?

Despite its über expensive reputation, Sweden is not a massively pricy place to visit. Expect slightly higher than UK prices and you'll not be too far off. Food and drink are a little over the norm, but then so is the quality. Set some money aside for a slap up seafood dinner.

What to take

UK outdoor gear should do you proud, but make sure you pack some sunscreen and insect repellent, although this close to the coast biting things are less of a problem. Bring a full rack and ropes etc if you're climbing, and some plasters.

Contacts

www.vasttrafik.se/en
– bus service information for West Sweden
www.ramsvik.nu
– Ramsvik website (English version available)
www.air-bus.se
– information on buses from airports in Sweden and connecting services.
www.westsweden.com
www.nordensark.se
www.bohusleden.se
www.cityairline.com
www.flysas.com
www.vikingtrails.co.uk
www.naturetravels.co.uk