

A Childhood Dream Rekindled

Mist curled gently above the lake as we paddled silently into the heart of Sweden's forested wilderness. It was the kind of moment I had only imagined as a child, watching *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* in the 1970s — a show that spoke of peace, solitude, and the unspoiled beauty of nature. Now, decades later, I was living it. The theme tune to the series was particularly evocative, written by Thom Pace and titled "Maybe":

*"Deep inside the forest
Is a door into another land
Here is our life and home
We are staying, here forever
In the beauty of this place all alone
We keep on hoping*

*Maybe
There's a world where we don't have to run
And maybe
There's a time we'll call our own
Living free in harmony and majesty
Take me home
Take me home"*
Thom Pace : Maybe

The lyrics spoke of a quieter, peaceful place, where hope and solitude could be found in the wilderness.

I've been to Sweden on a few occasions previously and I've always been pleased to discover that, outside of the cities, there are areas of unspoilt wilderness and solitude. Seventeen years previously, I had taken the Svartälven canoe tour with my wife and now, with a son who had just completed the long slog through GCSEs, it was time to go back into the forests. My son brought a friend and his father, so as "two dads and two lads" we made the booking through Nature Travels. Plans for a week touring with the canoes were made and the excitement grew. Both boys were confident outdoors, having completed the Ten Tors challenge twice on Dartmoor, and we knew that this would be an excellent adventure for both of them.

The Journey Begins: Devon to Gothenburg

The trip from Devon, via Heathrow, to Gothenburg was surprisingly straightforward. We were able to take a National Express coach from nearby straight to the Heathrow terminal. Hauling our heavy rucksacks through the airport building kept us busy but once we were through check-in, security and ready for departure, we relaxed. The flight itself is fairly short, being a little short of two hours, but the change in time zone does make it look like three hours. We spent the night in a quirky floating hotel docked in Gothenburg's harbour — a peaceful spot before heading into the wild.



Stocking Up and Settling In

After a relaxing night, and an amazing breakfast, we travelled up to Karlstad on the train. Our accommodation for the evening was the Karlstad Sport Hostel, not far from the rail station and a large supermarket which was to be our source of supplies for the week ahead. After dropping off our bags, we headed out to buy food for about 4 days, knowing that we should be able to restock part way through the trip. Lumbering with arm-loads of carrier bags, we settled into our 4-bed room, only to be woken at 1am with the fire alarm sounding. Fortunately the night was warm and as we shuffled outside, the guests were treated to a visit from the fire engine, and a triggered alarm sensor was located.

The following day, we caught the bus north to Sjögränd. The tour consists of a lot of "middle of nowhere" moments, and this was one of them. Thankfully, the arrangements that were made for us meant that we were met by Simon in a minibus, ready to take us to the centre at Gunnerud. Simon explained the trip and showed

us an introductory video, which we then followed up with loading the canoes onto the roof of the minibus. Driving out to the start point, we had an opportunity to see how much of the locality is covered with forest and lakes.

Into the Wild: Canoes and Campfires

Unloading the van took very little time and soon it was time to say goodbye to Simon as he went back to the centre. Packing the canoes sensibly took a little longer, transferring some of our belongings into the more waterproof dry bags and the barrel provided. A couple of photographs later, we were into the canoes and gently paddling off down the lake. There was a gentle tailwind which, combined with our freshness and enthusiasm, meant that we made good progress. It was refreshing to be on the water, particularly after being on public transport for so long in the last few days.



As we headed south along the lake, there was an opportunity to really take stock of the environment that we were now in. This really is a wilderness area, albeit with an occasional peek of a red-painted wooden house tucked away amongst the trees.

Feeling the need for a rest-stop after a couple of hours, we beached the canoes and stepped into a sun-dappled clearing, the air thick with the sweet scent of pine and the tart aroma of bilberries crushed underfoot. Here the bilberries and lingonberries were growing in abundance. We also saw huge wood-ant nests the size of large bean-bags, as well as abundant Penny Bun (*Boletus Edulis*) fungi. We ate loads of the bilberries, sampled the lingonberries but left out the fungi in case I had made a mistake in identification.



Back in the canoes and off down the lake once more. We stopped at a wind-shelter near to a dam and laid out our tents for the first night. Scouring the woods, we found firewood to supplement the small pieces left under a shelter for visitors. It fell to the boys to get the fire lit, using tinder-card, birch bark and fire-steels. Soon we were able to warm ourselves, but not before the boys had gone for a swim in the lake. After an evening meal of noodles, salami, peppers and onions, it was time for our first night in the tents. The 3-4 person tents supplied had loads of room to spread out in with only two in each tent.



Our first morning started with mist gently floating across the water, but it soon cleared as we prepared a breakfast of porridge, bilberries and maple syrup. Packing up the equipment, we headed off behind the dam for our first portage of the trip. Once back in the water with the canoes, we found that packing was quicker, and throughout the trip this speed would continue to improve.

Rest Stops and River Life

The next few days consisted of more paddling, followed by searching the river and lake shores for suitable camping spots. Our routine improved rapidly and we alternated between father and son canoe partnerships, and letting the boys have their own canoe. Everyone soon became adept at identifying a spot to pause for lunch or for the evening, and each night brought another camp fire and more toasted marshmallows. Watching the boys handle the canoes, light the fires, and navigate the wild reminded me just how capable they'd become.



Supplies, Fishing, and Slower Days

Soon, we were headed towards the small town of Lesjöfors. We had arranged our itinerary so that we would arrive at the small restaurant in time for lunch, followed by a visit to the supermarket for more supplies. We were getting through the food quickly, but that was to be expected with two hungry and active teenagers in our group. We stocked up once more on Polarbread and more squeezezy cheese in various flavours. This was to be our main staple diet for lunch, and we didn't tire of it.

The remaining parts of the journey brought home the diverse uses for the land around us. We passed through an area of historical iron mining and smelting, and of course the evidence of timber forestry was all around us.

Being ahead of our itinerary meant that we could take the latter parts of the trip in a more leisurely fashion. We took advantage of the fishing license for some of the lakes and it was a joy to see my son catch a Perch, followed by a Pike. Both were returned quickly to the water after removal from the barbless hooks.



The Final Paddle

A couple more days of paddling brought us to the take-out point. We lifted the canoes out of the water and gently rinsed the accumulated pine-needles from the bottom of the boats. Our bags and equipment were carried up to the gravel track and we awaited the arrival of IngMarie and the minibus. The weather had been kind to us all week, except for a small amount of drizzle on the last morning.



Soon, our lift had arrived and we lifted the canoes on to the roof-rack ready for the trip home. There was time for one last look back at the lakes and forests that had been our home for the week, and Thom Pace came to mind once again:

*Walking through the land
Where every living thing is beautiful
Why does it have to end
We are calling, oh so sadly*

*On the whispers of the wind
As we send a dying message*

*Maybe
There's a world where we don't have to run
Maybe
There's a time we'll call our own
Living free in harmony and majesty
Take me home
Take me home
Thom Pace : Maybe*

Urban Sweden and Reflections

Once back in Karlstad, we headed for the Solakoop Bed and Breakfast. We revelled in the soft beds and warm showers, rising early for a comprehensive breakfast to set us up for the journey back to Gothenburg. We had a few days in the city before our flight back home, so we took the opportunity to visit the Aerozeum and use the ferries to visit Vrångö - one of the further out islands in the Gothenburg archipelago. The 1-hour ferry trip was lovely, and was included as part of our Zone A travel ticket for the bus and tram system.



I have no doubt that we'll be making plans to return to Sweden for another trip in the future. The boys have both been inspired by the scenery and the adventure, and will, in time make their own plans. Thanks to the support of the team at Nature Travels, the ease of travel within Sweden, and the sheer abundance of wild beauty, we were able to make some great memories during our time abroad.

Ivan also kindly gave some TOP TIPS from his tour:

Getting there – transport to and through Sweden:

- We travelled by National Express from our nearest pickup direct to Terminal 2/3. From there we flew British Airways to Gothenburg. From there, we caught the Flygbussarna airport bus for a 30-minute journey directly to the Central station. It's cheaper to book this online rather than paying direct at the airport machines or on the bus. Children travel cheaper.
- We caught the train from Gothenburg to Karlstad.
- Leaving Karlstad, our trip needed us to be collected from Sjögränd. Nature Travels will assist with the connection. We found it best to write down Sjögränd and show it to the driver. Somehow the pronunciation is like a cat bringing up a furball!
- Returning to Karlstad is straightforward – there is a layby for the bus to pull in at Gunnerud.
- If you have time in Gothenburg on your return, get a day ticket using the Västtrafik app. Buy a day ticket for 120SEK which includes up to three children, travelling in Zone A (which goes on for miles and includes a number of ferry services).

Accommodation:

- We stayed in the Good Morning+ Göteborg City hotel. It's on a ship moored in the harbour. Lovely views out onto the water, particularly at sunset. At the moment [August 2025], there's a lot of building work going on between the bus station and the harbour. We eventually found it easier to walk under Hisingsbron, into Östra Hamngatan past "4-Gott" and then through the Nordstan shopping centre to the bus/train stations. The breakfast was excellent – a wide range of items in the buffet including meat, eggs, lots of bread options, cereal, yoghurt, tea, coffee, hot chocolate and more. Tea and coffee available day and night.
- In Karlstad, we stayed initially at the Carlstad Sport Hostel. The rooms are large (we shared a four-bed room) but be aware of the extra charges for breakfast and bedding. For our return journey, we stayed at the Solakoop Bed and Breakfast, a short distance out of the city centre. A lovely breakfast was included in the cost. The B&B is also run as a cooperative and social enterprise. Both the hostel and the B&B are near to an ICA supermarket although finding a route to cross the E18 to get to Gustav Anders Gata was a bit more challenging. We found a subway near where Våxnäsgatan and Hamngatan cross at the Klarälven river.

Food:

- In Gothenburg, visit the 4-Gott in Östra Hamngatan for a huge selection of sweets and treats. We managed to get Marabou chocolate with salted licorice as an experiment, with mixed reviews from our party of four.
- Our main shopping trip in preparation was in Karlstad, at the ICA in Gustav Anders Gata. We were able to carry our food, along with our rucksacks, back to

the bus station. We also had a dry bag rucksack which was easier to carry for the heavier stuff.

Menu:

- Breakfast – porridge oats (Havregryn) with fresh bilberries and honey (Flytande honung) /maple syrup (ren lönnsirap) and milk (Mellanmjölk). We found the oats to be rougher and require a little more cooking, but still palatable. Also, on the first couple of days “Mini Cini” cereal with milk. These, however, turned into a quick nibble snack instead.
- Lunch – Polarbread or the Swedish flat bread (Hönö Skärgårdskaka) with squeezey cheese or herb spread.
 - Tartex Vegetabilisk pastej ört is a vegetarian paté
 - Räkost – shrimp paste squeezey cheese
 - Baconost – bacon flavour squeezey cheese
 - Mushroom soup is Kantarellsoppa
- Evening meals – dried meat (cajna salami) fried in oil (rapsolja) with onion (gul lök), peppers (parika gul, paprika röd) carrots (morot) and noodles (Nudlar), rice (Jasminris) or pasta (pasta spirali). We also added tomato and basil sauces and tomato puree where necessary. The noodles are available as a single portion pack that is quick cook and comes with a seasoning sachet. As a change during the week, we also added tinned meatballs (Köttbullar I Gräddsås) and tinned Chili Con Carne but looking back at the bill these were incredibly expensive compared to the other foods. A packet of hot dogs is Kycklinggrillkorv.
- For drinks, we found Iced Tea sachets (Iste Lemon, Mango and Peach) which was particularly nice when added to the water that we’d boiled from the lake. We also got through a great number of Oboy Vattenlöslig hot chocolate sachets. It certainly went down as the best hot chocolate we’ve ever had!
- Around the campfire, Smores was a welcome addition. Marshmallows plus “Digestive mörk choc” biscuits.