

An American Journey – Finding Asatru through NAS.

The following is an introspective look at my path from my first introduction to Nordiska Asa-Samfundet. This is part of my personal journey finding faith and understanding of my personal spirituality. The following is a condensed story from Spring 2017 to Fall 2021. Any thoughts and opinions are mine alone. Some events are slightly out of sequence, but I just wrote as I remembered, so if you were there in any part of this please forgive any omissions or timeline failures. As any story should begin, this one starts with a large glass of mead.

The Challenge.

Idavallen is a facebook forum for people that were what I will call “True Asatru”. Idavallen is where I was introduced to Nordiska Asa-Samfundet, (NAS) or Nordic Asatru Community (NAC). What I found was that NAS is a group practicing Asatru and based in old Norse practice and bringing the Asatru faith to mainstream in Scandinavia and slowly to North America and around the world. When I found out about NAS I immediately became a member, I knew that I had finally found a group that embraced my faith in the way that I was looking for. This is a group that holds the old faith in the highest regard without allowing political or agenda based teaching to guide the faith. The admin of Idavallen had posted pictures of a NAS blot, this was my first introduction to a group practicing a BLOT in a ceremony designed to honor the Gods and the Ancestors. I distinctly remember Håkan posting pictures and saying how he felt after the power of having a Blot at an old historically significant site. I was amazed, I had been looking for this for a long time.

At one point during some discussions of Asatru in the Idavallen facebook group, Stenar Sonevang posted an interesting idea of his. I can no longer find the post, so I will have to paraphrase.



From the left:: Håkan Ljunggren, Mark Kirkeby, Thommy Vähäsalo, Stenar Sonevang

To truly understand the Norse faith of Asatru you have to walk to grounds of our ancestors, you can not meet and fully understand the Gods without ever walking in Scandinavia.

*****Stenar Sonevang***

In my typical fashion at the time I took offense to this, I was heathen, I was Asatru, I was a member of NAS, I was a proud American, how dare he say I needed to put my feet on the ground in Scandinavia to fully

embrace my spiritual path. I was beside myself, I even wrote a dissertation in the Idavallen group wondering “What is Norse enough” and “How do I join this group?” I did not really know Stenar at this

point, I knew who he was and his position in NAS, but I still felt the need to say F*#\$ you, I will show you. At this particular point my life was unraveling quite rapidly, I had started divorce proceedings, I had sold

my business and was planning to vacate Southern California and all that I had known for over a decade. This certainly seemed like the best time for a spiritual adventure.

So I booked tickets to Sweden to attend the NAS Midsummer Blot at Gamla Uppsala

Sweden.

I would show that Stenar guy that I was Norse enough and Heathen enough. An adventure into crossing cultural boundaries begins here. I have traveled the world a bit, even feel that I am a bit internationally experienced. I was not fully prepared for

Sweden. I was to meet some people that I knew from facebook, and Idavallen I had no real idea what to expect. I am not a person that has a large group of friends or even family. That was about to change.

Arrival.

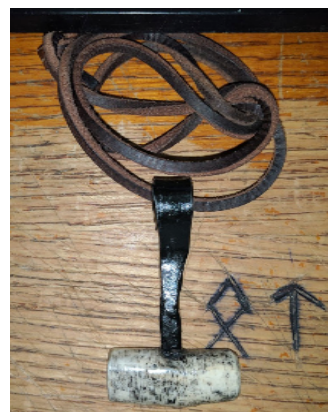
I arrived at Arlanda Airport in Stockholm and was greeted by Håkan, I had never been greeted in Swedish fashion before. I am American, we shake hands and call it good, maybe a nod as well, this was not good enough for Håkan, he gave me a proper Swedish hug and welcomed me to Sweden.

Gifts.

I am a person that loves and prefers to give gifts than to receive, I can graciously accept a gift but largely prefer to give. My checked luggage coming to Sweden was purposeful only for transporting of gifts, but we will get to that later.

As soon as Håkan had me in his car he gave me a one of a kind treasure that I cherish to this day.

He gave me a small gift box, that when I opened it I found a Mjölñir hand crafted from Iron and a Roe Deer horn. I still wear this Mjölñir today 5 years later and have nearly every day since. This was only the beginning of the Swedish hospitality and kindness that I was about to experience.



We arrived at the camping area in Gamla Uppsala where many NAS members would be staying for the Blot and the following feast. Håkan assisted to get me checked into the small cabin that I had rented and let me know to come to his campsite and meet with others. Shortly after stowing my small amount of gear I headed over to the campsite.



I was in absolute awe of Sweden, having just left the wastelands of Southern California the day before, to be walking in the tall green grass, and walking through the wood was an absolute joy.

This is what can lift the spirit and set loose the tension of life in general, I felt a peace that was needed, and I had found it in Sweden. I came to Håkan's camp and found preparation for a BBQ, and a meeting of friends and a few glasses of amazing mjöd would be consumed. I met many people this day that I can still call most friends, and most family.

My turn.

The gifts that I had prepared for coming to Sweden were made by me, custom laser engraved whiskey flasks, and it would be improper to give a flask without something to put in

it, here is where the checked luggage came in, I had brought from U.S.A., Jack Daniels Honey whiskey. I felt much better being able to reciprocate a gift and it was an absolute delight to watch Håkan open his flask fill it, and take a drink. I had two other flasks to give as gifts. I had felt the need to show my appreciation to NAS, I had also made a flask for Matte and Stenar. I did also get the opportunity to give Stenar his gift of a flask and a bottle of whiskey. I did not get the opportunity to meet with Matte on this trip but hope sometime when I go back I will. I was later astounded when Stenar gave me a gift it was a small silver replica of the largest or most inscribed rune stone in Sweden- the Rök Runestone. Both of these gifts are treasures that I will have for the rest of my life the gift from Stenar will be part of my altar and a vivid token of remembrance of my trip to Sweden.



Gamla Uppsala (Old Uppsala).

We arrived at Gamla Uppsala and this was the first time that I had walked on ancient grounds of our ancestors. I toured the museum and was amazed at the amount of history from this location. Jeppa took exceptional pride in giving me a tour and showing me the interactive Ipad walk through this historic site. I recommend this spot for anyone that wishes to touch close to our ancestral heritage. Truly a location that held deep meaning and the power. I felt the power of this location walking the burial mounds, it was palpable.



I had never experienced anything like this. I spent some time walking the mounds of the Gamla Uppsala burial mounds and found a moment of peace that I sat atop one of the mounds and meditated. I actually had a spiritual awakening and a vision during my meditation. This was something that I was not prepared for, I had never had an experience such as this before. This is a story for another time, but imagine this is the moment when I had to admit "Stenar was RIGHT!"

NAS Blot.

I was unsure of what exactly to expect, as I had never participated in a group Blot before, though I had been a member of NAS for some time, I still considered myself a solo Asatruar, and here I was in a location that is attributed to the Norse gods and filled with history of my ancestors. For the first time ever I walked to a Blot site to the beat of a ceremonial drum. The walk was inspiring as well, I was with a group of Swedish Asatru and we formed the BLOT circle.

Here is where things got a bit more interesting for me, the entire blot was performed in Swedish. I have to give special thanks to Tommy Kilenius for translating and giving me understanding of the ceremony, I would have been completely lost without this help. I won't go through the details of the Blot, but only to say that you have to stand in the Blot circle and be part of it to fully experience the spiritual power of a NAS Blot.

Feast.

To truly feel the Swedish hospitality, you must experience a feast with a group of heathens. The kindness and brotherhood that I found with this group is actually beyond measure.

To drink Mjöd and feast with NAS was just another level of family developed with NAS that I was not expectant of. There is not a function or meeting of party that I have been to in

America that can actually stand up to the NAS feast. Amazing food, amazing friends and complete acceptance of "The American". Every time I met with someone during this journey I was greeted with a kindness and warmth that any American can not say they are used to in any way, except with family.

After just one more day of camping with NAS and enjoying food, drink and amazing company, and seeing some absolutely crazy Swedes in action, I sadly had to return home to California. But I left Sweden with a connection to the Land, The People, and to my faith and spirituality.

America.

My return to USA from this trip left me with so many feelings and emotions. I can say that I had a spiritual awakening without any doubt. This trip had changed me, and my understanding of Asatru, and I was witness to what it meant to so many others, and I was accepted as one of them. From this point my personal blot's and offerings to the Gods changed quite a bit, I had much more to say to the gods when I spoke with them.



My personal and professional life were unraveling quickly at this point in my life, but with my faith and understanding I now opened myself to change. This was a new beginning for me. I left California and recreated almost every aspect of my life. Exciting, and frightening at the same time.

What is next.

In my new life that I had started upon I found many new opportunities in front of me, and I chose to follow a path of a wanderer, I embrace this in it's fullest and it has led to some interesting places. I had an opportunity to take a job out of the country and as I made my plans to be away from home for a year, I realized that I did not wish to take this year contract without meeting with my NAS family again. I felt a strong desire to return to Sweden for Midsummer again and to have a Blot with NAS before I went away. The Mid Summer Blot on this year was to be in Ales Stenar in the farthest south of Sweden. I booked my tickets and found that the easiest way to get to South Sweden was to travel to Denmark.



I arrived in Copenhagen a day early I spent an amazing day walking about and just feeling the excitement of being in Denmark. One thing that I have always noticed coming from America is that the modern history in USA can be measured in hundreds of years. Walking anywhere in Scandinavia, or for that matter in Europe you feel and see history that goes back thousands of years. Walking where I knew my ancestors had walked generations before definitely gives me a feeling of satisfaction and completeness. I spent a day walking about the small fishing village of Dragør, Denmark. Side note, this is a very historic village and amazingly beautiful, if you have a chance, it is an easy journey from the airport in Copenhagen. I booked a night to stay in in the old Dragør Fort. The German army used the fort as a barracks. Dragør Fort is a 100-year-old fort and is now a restaurant, and a conference hall. There were few people booked when I was there so I got a personal tour of the facility- Amazing.

Return to Sweden.

Stenar had offered to collect me in Denmark and drive me to the area that NAS was having Mid Summer Blot in Skåne County. Another amazing and significant site to the Old Norse, Ales Stenar (Ales Stones) - search this on the internet, amazing place. So the journey from Denmark to Sweden is something amazing in itself, I could only have imagined driving across



Øresundbroen (Øresund Bridge), this was a bit of a bucket list item for me, and away we went, pointed North to Sweden.

We arrived at a camping spot near Ales Stenar and found a collection of NAS already present, this is what a party is made of. An amazing night with fellow NAS members and watching practice and preparation on the beach for the coming Blot was amazing. But a night of drinking Mjöd and Ale was an amazing night to be present among friends and family in Sweden again.



We took a trip to see Ales Stenar, what an amazing place! There is no feeling like standing and touching a RuneStones, and feeling your way back through history, but Ales Stenar is something quite magnificent and different than I could even imagine (59 stones). You can only stand in Awe and wonder at such a place, and I instantly understood why this location had been chosen. After our first trip to Ales Stenar we went as

a group to Kåseberga just a short walk and had a wonderful meal of fresh fish on the docks. If you have never had fresh Grillade Sill (BBQ Herring) you have truly missed out.

The next day I met with a wonderful woman that I had been talking to several times a week to exchange information on American Culture and Swedish culture since my first journey to Sweden.

She arrived to a camping spot near Ales Stenar and we got her camp trailer set up and ready for the weekend festivities.

My luck had it that it was near Kristian Svensson, he and I had some business that needed to be resolved and it

would involve a large amount of Whiskey and Beer. I would never imagine to come to Sweden without bringing some American Whiskey, the choice this time was Honey Jim Beam, OK I know is not the best whiskey you can get, but the bottle came out and the stories

began. Good to be among family again. Late in the night Håkan arrives, and the whiskey is but a memory, but the Mead has arrived.

Things get a little hazy after this.

The Blot.

Again I was amazed to walk the path to the Blot to the sound of the ceremonial drum as a large contingent of NAS members hiked together to Ales Stenar. The power of walking to this Blot at a place that has history over 5000 years old, and traces to the Viking era of the stones being placed estimated around 540–650 CE brings the power of this location to a level that can not be understood without walking there, and seeing and touching each stone. With Wardruna playing and the drum beating I walked through and placed my hands on the stones as we formed the Blot circle.

Probably the most spiritually fulfilling ceremony that I have taken part in, again you could feel the power of our ancestors and the honor that we showed to them and the Gods was again fulfilling and spiritually lifting.

Feast and Apostasy.

The NAS feast was an outdoor BBQ in the camp area near Ales Stenar, the mead and ale were flowing and reunion of friends is something that can only be experienced.

This time though there was something new. A ceremony to denounce any religion that had been forced unwillingly upon you and to formally take Asatru as your chosen Faith.

I watched as member after member took part in this ritual to shed unwanted or forced religious beliefs,

I think that it is important that someone is able to denounce something that had been forced on them and to hold high the pride in embracing our ancestral faith. I had a bit of wish-fulness that I could participate in this ceremony. I was fortunate that I had not had religion crammed down my throat as a child, I was free of the fetters of faith that was not my choice, I have always been pagan. Stenar Sonevang spoke with me and let me know that I should do the ceremony and accept Asatru as my chosen faith. It was my honor to stand in front of my Brothers and Sisters in NAS and complete the ceremony, Performed by my friend Pernilla to conduct the ritual in English. I proudly have the certificate from NAS showing my Faith as Asatru.



How far South can you go.



My journey to my new job took me to The South Pole, as far south as you can go, interestingly this also means that all directions point North. My home for a full year was the ice desert of Antarctica. This would be a very interesting year. An interesting thing of Antarctica is that the seasons are reversed from the Northern

Hemisphere, so I had a unique opportunity to celebrate Mid Summer two times in a single year. Stenar had given me a NAS flag, and with this flag displayed I held a Blot at the Geographical South Pole on Mid Summer afternoon, you may have seen a picture on the NAS website of me standing on the ice at The South Pole with the NAS flag. I may not be the only heathen to give an offering at the South Pole, but I like to think I am, It was a proud moment to send the picture to Stenar and Håkan with the NAS flag flying on The Ice. Interesting side note, I had found two other pagans at The South Pole, and a Wiccan and a Buddhist, they participated in this Blot. I had written a full blot following the NAS Blot Order and with help again from Pernilla, created a proper NAS blot for the South Pole. It was my Honor.

Mid Winter at South Pole was a bit different, as it is dark outside, and I mean dark no sun had shown on the ice for several months, it was the depth of winter and the temperature outside was about -90F (- 68C) so an outdoor Blot was not practical so I had to improvise a bit. I did have an indoor blot, and took an offer bowl to The South Pole, but it was frozen solid when I got there. I tapped it out and thanked the Gods in a place that only Skadi could love.

Returning Home



I left Antarctica mid November 2019, and the first plan that I made was to journey back to Sweden and experience a Swedish Jul. My friend Pernilla would be my host and I traveled to Sweden at the end of December. I remember leaving Antarctica and the only thought I had was to go to Sweden. This has now become something that I say in my life “All Paths lead me back to Sweden”.

I flew into Stockholm and was able to spend a day as a tourist, I went to see the Viking Museum, the Vasa Museum, the ABBA museum, but the amazing memory was then RBA Peter hosted me along with Cajsa and Saga at Aifur Krog & Bar – the Viking Bar in Stockholm, Mead was drank, meat was eaten, and memories made. The journey continued to the Norrköping area of Sweden where I was to experience a traditional Swedish Jul.

I was hosted for 10 days by my friend Pernilla who toured me around the Norrköping area showing me Runestones, the amazing rock carvings in Norrköping and a trip down to the famed runestone “Rökstenan” (Smoke Stone). I now also have a picture with hands on this amazing artifact of our ancestors. Definitely a must visit place in Sweden.



Unknown to me The Sleipner Blot group in Östergötland was to hold a Jul blot and feast. This is an amazing turn of my luck to come from South Pole to Sweden and have a Jul Blot. Håkan and Stenar both took the journey from their homes to Linköping to enjoy a Blot and feast hosted by Kristian and the Sleipner Blot group.

Again the warmth and hospitality of Sweden and NAS was nearly overwhelming. I truly love these people. During this trip I was able to present to Stenar the NAS flag that I had taken to The South Pole as a token to NAS from me. small stone that traveled with me from Antarctica and placed in his Harg, a tradition that I hope to continue. Jul in Sweden is of course an unforgettable experience and to have the experience with NAS is no less than incredible. But Bingo lotto (seriously WTF), some traditions are just foreign and weird.

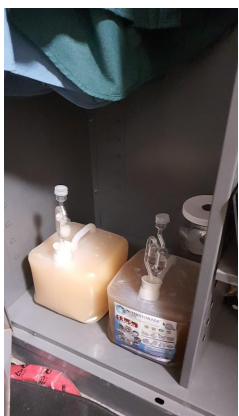
Wandering East.

My next contract that I took was to work in the middle east, I was to leave in March 2020 , but the entire world went absolutely mad with Corona.

I did not leave to Iraq until

September 2020. During my stay in Baghdad, I discovered that this is a place the the Norse gods have little use for, but they went in my mind, spirit and heart.

My first blot in Iraq was for Jul, I felt it very fitting to hold a Norse Pagan Ritual as deep in Islam as you can get. I had a small flask of mead that I had brought from USA with me, and I shared every last drop with the gods.



My next Blot I was planning was Mid Summer, but I was without mead or whiskey because the Military base I was on was under general order 1, no alcohol. To solve this, I took to Amazon and ordered some basic supplies, Air locks, 5 liter bottles and some yeast. The local Iraq merchant was more than willing to supply

me with as many kilos of honey as I wanted, and the result is my personal closet made Iraq mjöd.

With this I made several liters of Iraq mjöd and after some extensive quality testing found that I had mjöd suitable for a Blot. I had a late evening Blot Midsummer in Baghdad, apples from the DFAC and mjöd from my closet. Again I held a blot under the NAS flag on an insanely hot summer evening. I can personally tell you that there is nothing more spiritually fulfilling

than to hold a Blot deep in Islam, it felt good and it felt right.
The mead was actually quite special, I bottled

some to take back to Sweden with me and share with my NAS Brothers.

Going Home.

Leaving Baghdad Iraq after completing my contract, I did not find any need to return to USA, my path this time led directly back to Sweden. This trip my timing could not be better, as another bucket list item was happening during this trip, and that was to attend the NAS Allting, and Winters Finding (Autum Equinox) Blot. This is something I had heard of, but never really imagined that I would be able to make time and plans fit to be able to attend the NAS Allting and represent America. But this would not be any ordinary trip. With my friend Pernilla we left to travel to the NAS blot before the Allting, but I thought it would be a good idea to stop at Ikea in Linköping and have a Swedish meatball for lunch, my timing was a bit off as we barely made it to the Blot, but we were fortunate that the circle had not been closed yet and RBA Tommy invited us to join the circle and an amazing Blot was had at a powerful old Norse site. After the Blot we traveled the short distance to the hall where the Allting was being held, here I found Håkan, Stenar and Kristian, and was met with the expected Swedish hug, damn it is good to see family after way to long. As it turns out I did not have the time to spend in representation of America at The Allting, Saturday afternoon 25 September Pernilla and I were married at the city hall of Norrköping. I may have announced this as a bit of a surprise in front of the NAS Allting. Now Sweden is all about family, it is home, and I have the ring to prove it. Pernilla and I returned to participate in the final moments of the Allting.

I can tell you that my Swedish is a bit weak, so my full understanding of the proceedings was not complete, but Pernilla was translating the essential bits for me. Here is where things get a bit confusing as Stenar called out my name. An honest WTF moment was happening, why would he be calling my name, the Allting was not yet complete.

So the total amazing day that I was having so far

1. Meatballs at Ikea
2. Blot with NAS
3. Marry my best friend Pernilla,
4. the NAS Allting
5. Now I was being called up in front of the board and members of NAS to be given the Honor as the first Thegn of NAS, An Ambassador to Asatru and NAS. There could be absolutely no higher honour that I could imagine and this day is one that shall ever be embedded in my mind.



Since joining NAS and my first trip to Sweden to walk my ancestral land and embrace the Norse Gods and faith, my life has done nothing other than improve. For me, all paths lead home to Sweden, and I look forward to continuing this with my Family of NAS.

So in ending this story , I wish to raise the horn of mjöd and extend Stenar's challenge to anyone living outside of Scandinavia -



To truly understand the Norse faith of Asatru you have to walk to grounds of our ancestors, you can not meet and fully understand the Gods without ever walking in Scandinavia.

****Stenar Sonevang**

With Warmest Regards,
Mark Kirkeby -USA
Thegn -Nordiska Asa-Samfundet