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23 January, 2013

Everyday Adventurer Mark Waring – 'Into the Hall of the Troll King' -**Backpacking Norway's Roof**

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I had plenty of time this trip to ponder Norway's mountain weather; primarily biting wind and cold rain and a final contemptuous transformation into driving snow. I was backpacking the roof of central Norway, across the wild national parks of Dovrefjell and the Rondane, self sufficient for a nine day walk. Following a route of my own devising, I traversed high and lonely mountains, drained often of colour by heavy wet weather and subject to unseasonal bitter cold.



To any lover of wild places Norway is special. It's a country dominated by scores of mountain chains, with a variety of character, stretching far above the Arctic circle. Sparsely populated there's a giddy freedom in a land where wild walking and camping, protected in law, are supported by an extensive network of trails and welcoming huts. Coupled with the most modern of infrastructures and a friendly population with outdoor life coursing through their blood. It's also a place

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Seeking my own trail I made my way from birch forest and gentle pasture up onto the hard rocky plateau of Dovrefjell, a national park since 1911 and home to rare montane flora and fauna as much high peaks and ridges. It's character is renowned; raw, resolute and unyielding, it has given birth to the Norwegian expression 'till Dovre faller' ('until Dovre's mountain fall'), meaning 'to the end of time'. Dovrefjell has a reputation as well for weather and the infamy of foul conditions.



My first two camps were dry, the only two of the trip, seeing me to within striking distance of Snohetta, Norway's second highest peak. The walk there had taken me past a number of well maintained huts. An old Norwegian man, contently smoking a pipe, wished me 'God Tur!' ('good mountain trip'!) as I passed by. I'll never tire of hearing that. The weather, as cheery as the greeting, wasn't to last though. Setting camp on the eve of my planned ascent of Snohetta I was concerned by the darkening of clouds and the increased moisture in the air.

And that was that, the start of more or less constant precipitation for the remaining week of my trip, the challenge of which lay in the grim conditions. Snohetta was postponed for 24 hours as an intense storm battered my small shelter. I woke up to tent fabric straining against ferocious wind and rain. I shifted position and slept on, waking mid-morning to even more hostile weather. A day spent drinking tea, reading and simply studying the dancing seams of my inner tent punctuated the inevitable calls of nature. Those forays into the violence of the elements were brief and painful. The luxury of the return to my sleeping bag sweet.

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global team of athletes including Rob Jarman, Leo Houlding, Julia Pickering, Sean Leary and Philippe [...]

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Helen Keller

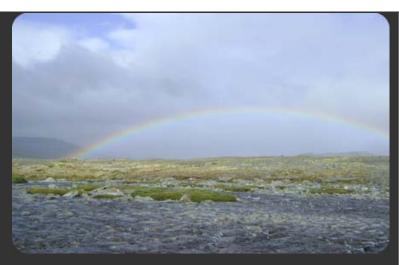
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My schedule dictated I had to move next morning. Encouraged by a drop in wind speed I packed up and headed out, up and over frozen Snohetta. Equipped only for summer walking, no ice axe dictated caution to the summit. In thick mist, ice and snow, over the sound of crunching neve, I caught snatches of something on the wind. Nothing supernatural but equally incongruous, eighties' power ballads! A small military installation at the summit guided me through dense cloud, an odd bearing formed by the chorus of the 'Final Countdown', wafting from an open window. Scant consolation for the missed views of the dizzy spires of neighbouring Jotunheim, the legendary 'home of the giants'.



Next a descent and a journey from 'monsters of rock' to simply monsters. Two hours later I respectfully rounded a herd of 'Musk Ox', huge powerful bovines, kin of the American bison, grazing contently in mountain pasture. The symbol of Dovrefjell these creatures, seemingly abandoned by the ice age, are deadly if roused.



And then two wet days across moorland to the splendour of the Rondane. Under

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iron clad sky I passed small groups out for ptarmigan, the 'fjellripa', hiding in low grassy fells. Norwegians hunt; they'll pack up for several mountain days and fish or shoot in their high places and its popular in this land where, before the oil came, hard subsistence prevailed.

The Asgard Project
The Asgard Project Out Takes



As I passed into the Rondane the trails meandered through forest and low hills, using the natural openings of tight ravines and gullies into the heart of the mountains. It's large plateaus are crowned by ten peaks above 2,000 metres, broken by marked valleys through the landscape (the deepest valley is filled by the stunning Rondvatnet) and it's a tantalising landscape for the mountain walker with an array of summits all within a day's walk. The Rondane's deep recesses hide Europe's last wild reindeer.

And here, in Norway's oldest national park, I had a tantalising glimpse of what my walk could have been. I awoke on my sixth camp to sunlight chasing away a heavy frost. Thawing frozen trail shoes over the stove I watched as the sun climbed blue sky and presented a landscape of mesmerising beauty. It was easy to see why Norway has a folklore of spirits and elementals. The verdant lower Rondane looked like some faerie kingdom carpeted with green mosses and yellow lichen amidst birch forest. Drawn by bright sunshine, perhaps foolishly, I was tempted into the Rondane's high places and the stronghold of the 'Troll King'.



Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt', Norway's national play, sets the confrontation of Peer with the 'Troll King' in his citadel high in the Rondane. With worsening weather, mist and eventual snow shrouded rocks and boulders. As I climbed suggestion given by limited visibility to supernatural shapes hidden in the talus. Norse mythology determines nine realms in the Asgardian universe, the climb to Storsmeden that afternoon was not one of man. The col, just under the mountain summit, was hostile in worsening weather and I felt a sense of trespass and foreboding, I was not wanted here. Forced to make a high camp I endured a freezing night.

And that was it, even thicker snow in the morning had me abandon my ascent, packing up with painful frozen extremities the sub-zero cold drove me out of the highlands and into valleys. Unlike Peer I had not triumphed and the snow followed me scornfully many hundreds of metres down until I reached the town of Otta. Suitably scolded, I climbed onto the train to Oslo freezing and wet. As I ever I felt a satisfaction in seeing out my planned route, for this trip though, it was hard

though to shake off the sense of pursuit, only by the weather no doubt. In Norway though, shrouded mountains and rich folklore combined can suggest otherwise.



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