

Dag Hammarskjöld's
BACKÅKRA





DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD AND BACKÅKRA

It was Dag Hammarskjöld's close friend, Bo Beskow a renowned painter, who introduced Hammarskjöld to Österlen on the Swedish south-east coast and to Backåkra. During his time as Secretary-General of the United Nations he spent much of the little free time he had there, living in a small fisherman's cottage near the sea, walking along the sandy shoreline and enjoying the solitude and calmness of the vast open landscape.

In 1957, at Beskow's suggestion, Hammarskjöld bought the old and neglected farmstead Backåkra, with its traditional half-timbered farmhouse. The two corresponded intensively, with Hammarskjöld deeply involved in decisions regarding the renovation and the creation of a nature reserve out of the farmstead's more than 70 acres of land. His plan was to make the farm his home, a quiet and peaceful retreat after an illustrious and hectic UN career. Sadly, due to Hammarskjöld's early and tragic death in 1961, he never got to live at Backåkra, but his will conveyed the vision of a unique gathering place for dialogue and contemplation.

The Swedish Tourist Association was left to execute this vision, having been bequeathed Backåkra in Hammarskjöld's will. They were asked to create 'a gathering place for the preservation of nature and culture, as well as a place for meetings on topics that serve the mission of the United Nations'. His will also stipulated that the southern wing of the house be set aside for use by the members of the Swedish Academy.

For many years, Backåkra operated as Hammarskjöld had intended. The Swedish Tourist Association organised conferences and symposiums and transformed the farm into a museum where Hammarskjöld's private possessions and gifts were exhibited, together with furniture and art from his New York apartment. In 2011 Backåkra closed due to pressing renovation needs, but it reopened in 2018 under new leadership committed to preserving Hammarskjöld's vision.

REALISING HAMMARSKJÖLD'S VISION AND LEGACY

More than half a century has passed since Dag Hammarskjöld's death, but he is still remembered and praised for his integrity, principled leadership and unwavering belief in the UN's mission. He created standards against which his successors continue to be measured and left a lasting legacy of the role and responsibilities of the international civil servant. Yet, Hammarskjöld was not only the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, but a citizen of the world and a man of many disciplines. He had a great interest in literature, art, photography, music and modern design.

Many have attested that Hammarskjöld worked constantly and slept few hours. This didn't seem to trouble him, rather it allowed him to correspond with family and friends, such as the sculptor Barbara Hepworth and writer John Steinbeck, and fully embrace this artistic, cultural and literary side. Thus, even though the demands of his post were great,

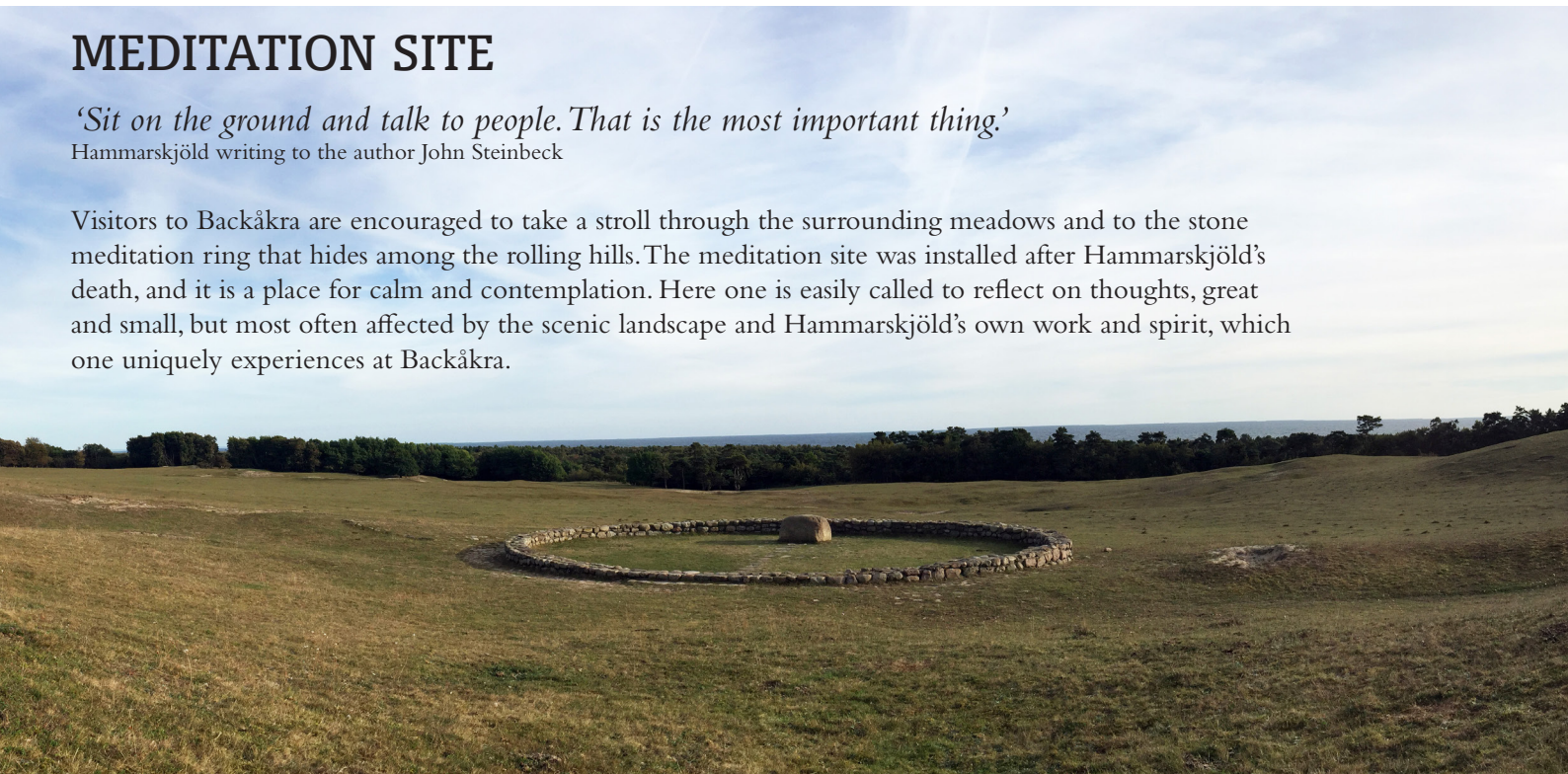
Hammarskjöld found time to translate work of philosophers such as Martin Buber, photograph Mount Everest for National Geographic, engage in the design of the UN meditation room together with Beskow, and chronicle his hikes in the Swedish mountains as the president of the Swedish Alpinist Club. He also gladly served as a member of the Swedish Academy, the body that awards the Nobel Prize for Literature. Another important part of his legacy is his journal of personal and spiritual reflections which was published posthumously as *Markings* in 1963. Hammarskjöld described the entries in the journal as 'the only true "profile" that can be drawn...concerning my negotiations with myself—and with God'. At Backåkra one encounters this spiritual side of Hammarskjöld, along with his many other traits, as his vision for the farm blends together all the elements of his powerful legacy.

MEDITATION SITE

'Sit on the ground and talk to people. That is the most important thing.'

Hammarskjöld writing to the author John Steinbeck

Visitors to Backåkra are encouraged to take a stroll through the surrounding meadows and to the stone meditation ring that hides among the rolling hills. The meditation site was installed after Hammarskjöld's death, and it is a place for calm and contemplation. Here one is easily called to reflect on thoughts, great and small, but most often affected by the scenic landscape and Hammarskjöld's own work and spirit, which one uniquely experiences at Backåkra.





'The longest journey is the journey inwards.'

Dag Hammarskjöld

A CONVERSATION WITH PEDER HAMMARSKIÖLD



Peder Hammarskiöld is the Chairman of Stiftelsen Dag Hammarskjölds Backåkra and the Hammarskjöld Family Association. In this Q&A he speaks about the recent renovation of Backåkra and which of Dag Hammarskjöld's many personal items stand out to him.

Backåkra underwent an extensive renovation during 2017 which you followed closely.

What surprised you the most during the process?

The size and scope of Dag Hammarskjöld's collection of modern art and modern furniture. Wherever I turned during the renovation process it felt like we discovered a new piece of invaluable art or furniture that I hadn't seen before. It became very clear to me that Hammarskjöld not only had a deep appreciation for modern art but an incredible eye for rarity and quality. It's a joy that we can now share these items with the public again!

Backåkra is home to many of Hammarskjöld's personal things. What is your favourite item in the museum?

I would have to mention two things: The Barbara Hepworth sculpture 'Single Form' and the ice-axe from Sherpa Tenzing. The small wooden sculpture was in fact one of Dag Hammarskjöld's favourite objects and he kept it on the desk of his New York apartment. Many may recognise the sculpture because a full-scale version of it stands proudly outside the front of UN headquarters in New York. Hepworth was a friend of Hammarskjöld's

and after his death she was commissioned to recreate this favourite sculpture, leaving an obscured message on the inside: 'To the Glory of God and the memory of Dag Hammarskjöld'.

The ice-axe is originally also from Hammarskjöld's modernist New York apartment and it was a gift to him from Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. Together with Sir Edmund Hillary, Tenzing became the first to concur the summit of Mount Everest just a few weeks after Hammarskjöld had taken over at the UN. It amazes me that an axe that was part of such an epic journey now it hangs here at Backåkra.

What do you hope people who visit Backåkra will take away with them?

I hope people will come away with an appreciation for the uniqueness of both Backåkra and the man behind it. There is a distinct natural beauty about this place and hopefully visitors are moved by the scenic landscape and Dag Hammarskjöld's work and spirit, which one encounters in a truly distinctive way here.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Dag Hammarskjöld was born on 29 July 1905 in Jönköping, Sweden. He was the fourth son of Agnes and Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, Prime Minister of Sweden during World War I. Hammarskjöld spent most of his childhood in the university town of Uppsala where his father then served as County Governor. The family Hammarskjöld was academically high-achieving and there was an expectation that the four sons –Dag was the youngest– would study hard and after their studies take on senior government positions. Hammarskjöld studied diligently at Uppsala University and was awarded Bachelor Degrees in linguistics, literature, history and law, as well as a doctorate in economics, preparing him for a distinguished career in the Swedish civil service.

SWEDISH CIVIL SERVANT

Hammarskjöld held several senior positions within the Swedish civil service, which included State Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, Chairman of the National Bank of Sweden's Board, and State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although serving with the Social-Democratic cabinet, Hammarskjöld was never affiliated to a political party, regarding himself as politically independent. In March 1953, while Hammarskjöld served as Deputy Foreign Minister, the Security Council of the UN was in the process of choosing a new Secretary-General. Due to the strained political climate, the Security Council could not agree on a candidate, and Hammarskjöld was eventually suggested as one of many compromise candidates, surprising many, not least Hammarskjöld himself, when he was with short notice chosen for the role. A few days later when he stepped off the airplane in New York he was greeted by the outgoing Secretary-General Trygve Lie with the now infamous words 'welcome to the world's most impossible job'.

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD



UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

When Hammarskjöld arrived at the UN he was relatively unknown and many were curious about the young Swede with piercing blue eyes who was going to lead the organisation. The Security Council believed they had chosen a competent administrator who would not challenge the existing world order, but before long, they would learn just how thoroughly mistaken they had been. Hammarskjöld set out to lead by realising both dimensions of his title – as a ‘general’ and a ‘secretary’ and quickly went on to earn respect both inside and outside the organisation. An early triumph was the release of fifteen American airmen who had served under the UN Command in Korea but had been detained in the People’s Republic of China. Hammarskjöld employed an effective form of personal diplomacy in the matter, travelling to Beijing and meeting in person with Premier Zhou Enlai, who stated later that he timed the release of the prisoners as a way of maintaining his personal friendship with Hammarskjöld and as a gift for his 50th birthday, which he celebrated in the surroundings of Backåkra.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT THE UN

The political deadlock between East and West was constant dilemma for the UN and especially the Security Council. Hammarskjöld skilfully used diplomacy and the UN Charter to overcome this impasse, seeking out the General Assembly for the support and mandate he needed to broker peace in conflicts around the globe. Even though he was in many ways successful he often faced setbacks, particularly as most situations were politically and geographically complicated, such as the Suez Crisis of 1956. Despite this, the UN’s mandate and influence matured during Hammarskjöld’s tenure through, for example, the establishment of the UN’s first armed peacekeeping operation (UNEF). Hammarskjöld was deeply involved in the decolonisation of many African states and passionately defended the interests of these newer nations. It was during a UN mission to try to negotiate peace in the Congo in 1961 that Dag Hammarskjöld’s plane crashed near Ndola airport in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). All of the 16 passengers and crew perished. Recognising that Hammarskjöld lost his life in pursuit of dialogue and peace, he was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize the same year.



Backåkra is located in Österlen, Skåne, the province situated at the southernmost tip of Sweden. Close by is the historic setting of Ales Stenar, a stone formation dating back from the early Iron Age, located 30 meters above sea level with a magnificent view over Österlen's hilly landscape and the Baltic Sea.



STIFTELSEN DAG HAMMARSKJÖLDS BACKÅKRA

Through an amendment to Dag Hammarskjöld's will, a new foundation, Stiftelsen Dag Hammarskjölds Backåkra, took over ownership of Backåkra in 2015. The Foundation, established by the Hammarskjöld Family Association, the Swedish Tourist Association, and the Swedish Academy, refurbished the farm and Backåkra was reopened in the Spring of 2018. One wing hosts a newly designed exhibition space and the southern wing is reserved for organisations and researchers working on issues related to Hammarskjöld's legacy to host conferences and events. Visiting address: Backåkravägen 73, 271 77 Löderup

www.dhbackakra.se



Dag Hammarskjöld
Foundation

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in 1962 in memory of the second UN Secretary-General, which aims to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development and peace. The Swedish parliament took the initiative to set up the Foundation shortly after his tragic death and UN General Assembly Resolution 1757 welcomed its establishment. The Foundation is an autonomous institution and is unaffiliated with any political, religious or ideological groups; its work is guided by respect for and alignment to the principles outlined in the UN Charter.

www.daghammarskjold.se