

Söderköping and Göta Canal



Söderköping and the Waters

Three different watercourses have been of great importance to Söderköping; the river Storån, the spring of St Ragnhild and Göta Canal. Storån was during the Iron Age and Middle Ages a really large and navigable river. The town was founded here because of the river. The river runs to the Baltic Sea bay Slätbaken and therefore Söderköping became one of the country's most important harbour towns. Eventually the river became too shallow for larger vessels and Söderköping's size and importance as a harbour town decreased drastically.

The spring of St Ragnhild provided the town's inhabitants with drinking water and in 1774 the Spa of Söderköping were given a royal charter for treatments consisting of drinking the spring water. In the 1840ies baths and cold water cures were added to the business and thousands of guests visited the town.

Göta Canal was supposed to give Söderköping a new opportunity to once again become an important harbour town. A canal harbour was to be built in the town and the expectations for development were great. However, the canal never became as important as expected for either the shipping business or the local structure.

Today the canal is an important tourist route and many pleasure boats anchor in the canal harbour, which has become the centre of town in the summer.

Pleasure boats on the river by the quay at Söderköping's Spa.



Norrköping or Söderköping?

When it was decided to build the canal there were many discussions as to where the canal should run to – Slätbaken or Bråviken. Which town would get the benefits of having the canal run through it – Söderköping or Norrköping?

The Parliament first decided that the canal would run through Norrköping, but ten years later the decision was changed in favour of Söderköping, because the method for digging the canal changed. Instead of using a "wetdigging" method, they had decided to use a "drydigging" method, avoiding as much as possible the natural watercourses and thus avoiding problems with spring flooding or having to build weirs.

In 1772 the Parliament finally decided on the course of the canal but Norrköping started a 10-year long lobbying to get the canal back to them. The decision was upheld and Norrköping protested in writing:

"It (Söderköping) has a marshy and rough situation, has no shipping of importance and no important waters, no businesses of value, not even a small simple factory. Its businesses are mainly inns and horse trading in the markets of the country." They would do better to invest in Norrköping, "this important jewel in the country's crown".

The steamship Motala, built in 1855, leaves the lock in Söderköping. The ship is rebuilt to accommodate both passengers and cargo.



The Canal Grounds

In 1810 the Canal company was given a royal charter by king Karl XIII to build Göta Canal and the work started later that year in Motala. Baltzar von Platen was enlisted to design the canal, which he did together with one of Europe's finest canal designer, Thomas Telford.

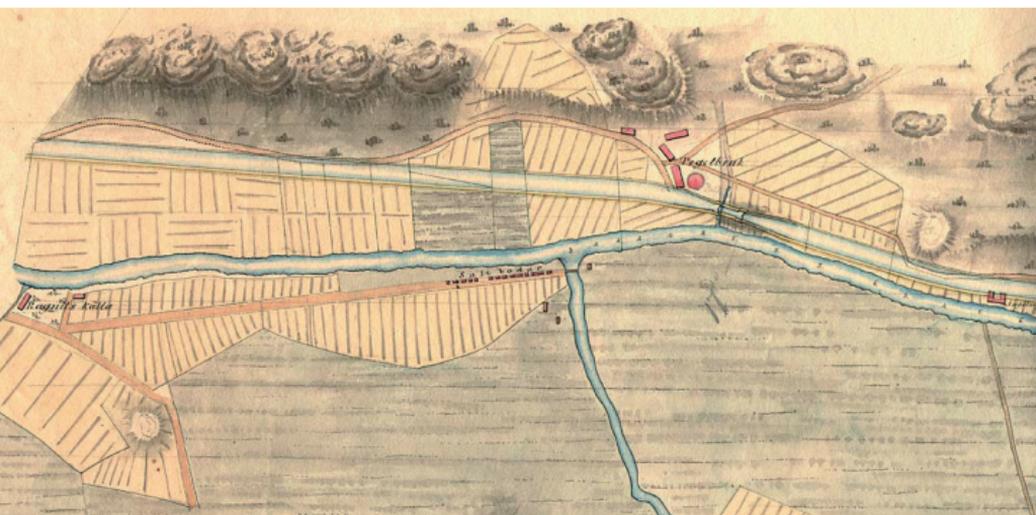
To be able to build the 190 kilometres long canal, a 118 metres wide and 87 kilometres long strip of land through Västergötland and Östergötland was purchased. The rest of the canal runs through natural watercourses. This property Kanaljorden, 1:1, is the longest property in Sweden.

The canal was built through fields and meadows, houses and plots in Söderköping. Half the quarter Bergskvarteret became grounds for the canal and the remains of the medieval church of St Ilian and its graveyard were destroyed. Some thirty dwellings and many outhouses were moved or demolished.

The town's appearance and the townspeople's movements in the town were changed because of this great construction. They now had to cross the canal in order to go north and to the mountain of Ramunder.

Below: Map from 1810 with the expropriated plots. The parallell lines diagonally across the map show the planned direction of the canal. Next page: Thomas Telford's plans, 1808, Söderköping and Tegelbruket.





The Naval Town Söderköping

Balzar von Platen launched in 1810 a plan for a base for the Swedish archipelago navy in Söderköping. To the west of the town, there were to be docks and sheds for 160 cannon skiffs, 48 cannon sloops, 10 galleys and 24 other boats. There would be sheds for material storage, ammunitions storage, hospital, workshops, ropemakers and others. The navy would be able to get to the archipelago fast, but also move quickly to Gothenburg.

The military examining the suggestion, discussed the running of the place, the means to obtain foods and the location in relation to the sea by Åland – but not what would happen if a cannon ball would shatter the locks in Mem! It was the high costs, not the risk of being locked in if the locks were destroyed, that put an end to the plans for Söderköping as a naval town.

The Construction Work

58 000 soliders, among them a couple of hundred Russian soldiers and russian prisoners of war, and 3 500 civilian craftsmen dug the canal by hand with steel capped spades. There were in total 7 millions days of work.

The work consisted of removing 8 million cubic metres of earth, blast and remove 200 000 m³ of rock and build 250 000 m³ of drystone walls. Craftsmen and English engineers were enlisted for the more specialized works such as locks, bridges and docks.

The soldiers lived in army quarters and also had to find time for drills. They were better payed than normally, but their working days were long and hard. The reveille sounded att 4 am and the tattoo att 9 pm and they had to work at least 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, between May and October.

They lived in mobile barracks, made for 20–220 persons and slept two and two on one metre wide bunk beds with straw mattresses and bed linen that was changed every second year. The weekly food ration was 8,5 kilos of bread, 4 kilos of flour, 1 kilo of meat, 0,5 kilo of pork, 1 kilo of herring, 1,5 litres of dry peas, salt and just above 1 litre of aquavit.

In the area of Söderköping the work was executed during 1822–1832. 480 men were stationed in Gäverstad and 400 men in Söderköping.

Clearing up the drained canal, early 20th century.



The Opening

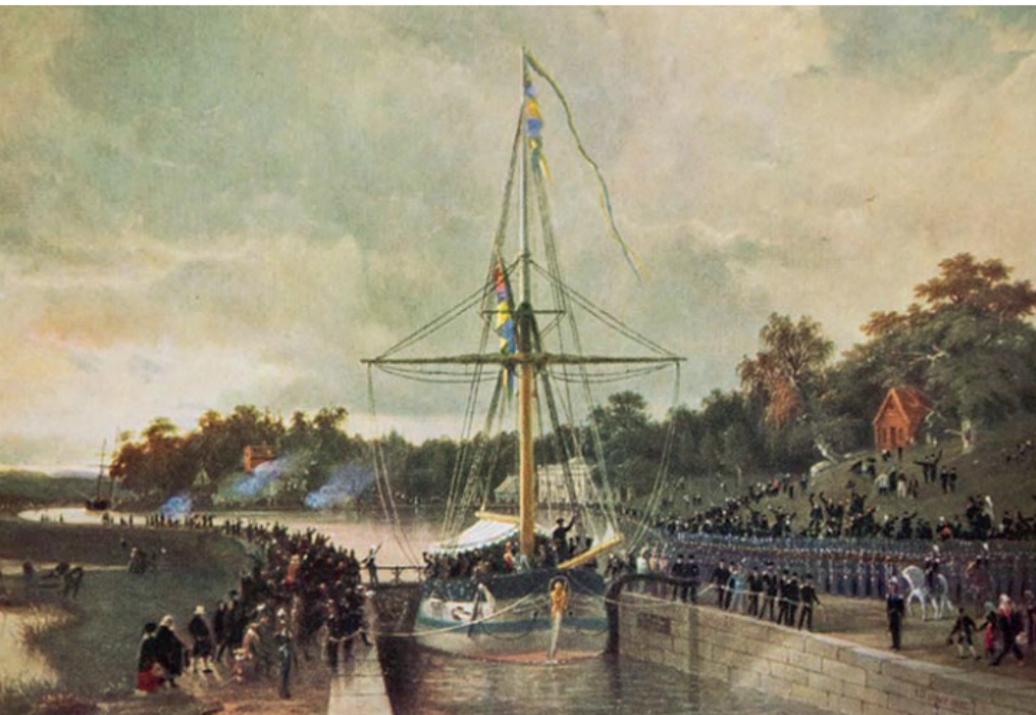
The opening of the completed canal took place in Mem on the 26th of September 1832, ten years after the completion of the western part of the canal. The estimated costs had then tenfolded.

King Karl XIV Johan and his queen Desideria and the Crown Prince and Princess, Oscar and Josefina, were to sail from Snövelstorp in the royal yacht Esplendian together with six other boats. When the royalty realised how many locks they had to pass, they went by horse and carriage instead to a festively decorated Söderköping for breakfast with the mayor. The other prominent guests were transported on the boats, towed by two horses for each boat.

The royalty embarked on the Esplendian in Söderköping and to music and the cheering of the people Esplendian was towed through the lock by the mayor and town council. Some 10 000 people stood along the canal and watched. The beaches in Mem were lit up by tar barrels and torches when Esplendian arrived by last light to Mem. She was towed through the last lock by the members of the Canal company board.

There were fireworks and a banquet in the evening. In his opening speech Karl XIV Johan paid tribute to Baltzar von Platen "who had designed this great work and had the courage to execute it". Baltzar von Platen himself never saw the completed canal since he died in 1829.

Painting by Johan Chr Berger 1855 showing the arrival of the Esplendian at Mem on opening day.



The Locks in Söderköping

On the part of the canal from Mem to the east and Snövelstorp to the west there are one dry dock, four bridges, eight single locks and two double locks. The rise of the water is all in all 27 metres. There are also three harbours; Mem, Söderköping and Snövelstorp.

The water-level must be equal on both sides of the lock to be able to open it. The basin is filled by gates in the lock. Every lock contains 1600 m³ water and 750 m³ water is moved in or out when passing through the lock.

The lock in Söderköping had to be rebuilt after only 15 years. The foundation was inferior due to the fact that it was built on the old remains of church and houses. The old lock was further to the east and it was filled in as late as 1891. To lessen the weight and pressure on the ground the new lock, as the only one, has a wooden floor.

The passenger steamer Juno rammed the lock in Söderköping on the 30th of June 1931. Both ship and passengers were alright, but the lower part of the lock gate was reduced to splinters. If the upper part of the gate had not been closed there would have been havoc. The repairs of the lock took nine days.

Repairs of the lock in Söderköping



All the locks were formally named after a person or a place as well as the name of the actual place of the lock.

Mem Lock

Formal name Bengt Erland Franc Sparre (the chairman of the Canal company after Baltzar von Platen)
Single lock built in 1832, with a rise of 3 metres.

Tegelbruket Lock

Formal name the Göta Canal Board.
Single lock built in 1832 with a rise of 2.3 metres.

Söderköping Lock

Formal name Söderköping.
Single lock built in 1847 with a rise of 2.4 metres.
The original lock was built in 1832.

Duvkullen Lower Lock

Formal name Gustaf Lagerheim (senior engineer at the Göta Canal company from 1820 to 1845.)
Single lock built in 1832 with a rise of 2.3 metres.

Duvkullen Upper Lock

Formal name Erik Hagström (senior engineer before 1820).
Single lock built in 1832 with a rise of 2.4 metres.

Mariehov Lower Lock

Formal name Mariestad.
Single lock built in 1832 with a rise of 2.1 metres.

Mariehov Upper Lock

Formal name Örebro.
Single lock built in 1831 with a rise of 2.6 metres.

Carlsborg Lower Lock

Formal name Scandinavia.
Double lock built in 1831 with a rise of 5.1 metres.

Carlsborg Upper Lock

Formal name Norrköping.
Double lock built in 1831 with a rise of 4.7 metres.

Klämman Lock

Formal name Linköping.
Single lock built in 1826. The gates are mostly open. The lock is mainly used to regulate the water level in the lake Asplången.

The Dockyard

Klevbrinken is one of three dry dockyards along the canal. The other two are situated in Motala and Sjötorp.

Klevbrinken was built in 1827 to accommodate nine vessels of varying sizes "six ordinary vessels and three smaller". There have also been a workshop and a shipyard here.

The dock is filled with water through paddles in the dock gates and when emptied the water is led through a culvert under the canal to a nearby stream.

The dockyard is still in use for a number of larger vessels.



The Lock- and Bridge-keepers

The locks were originally opened by 7 metres long bars, pulled forward, but this was replaced in 1847 with capstan and cogs. Some of the locks became electrically operated in 1969 and in 1978 they were hydraulically operated.

The bridges were either rolling or swinging bridges, managed by hand. The bridge at E22 is a bascule-bridge, built in 1963 and remote-controlled. There are plans for a aqueduct over the new road E22.

The lock- and bridge-keepers could not make a living from this job only, but had to have another occupation. The salary as a keeper consisted of a tied cottage, firewood, some land to cultivate for growing food and some cash. In 1905 the cash part of the salary for a bridge-keeper amounted to 220 SEK per year. The amount varied depending on whether you worked a bridge, a single or a double lock.

The job as keeper was often passed on through generations. It was a work around the clock. During the day the men often were away at other jobs. The women then took care of the keeper's job as well as taking care of the household and the many children, often under very primitive conditions. It could be 500 metres to the well. There were also the cultivating of the land in order to grow food.

The keeper's equipment consisted of a whistle, a red and a blue flag and a lantern with red and blue glass.





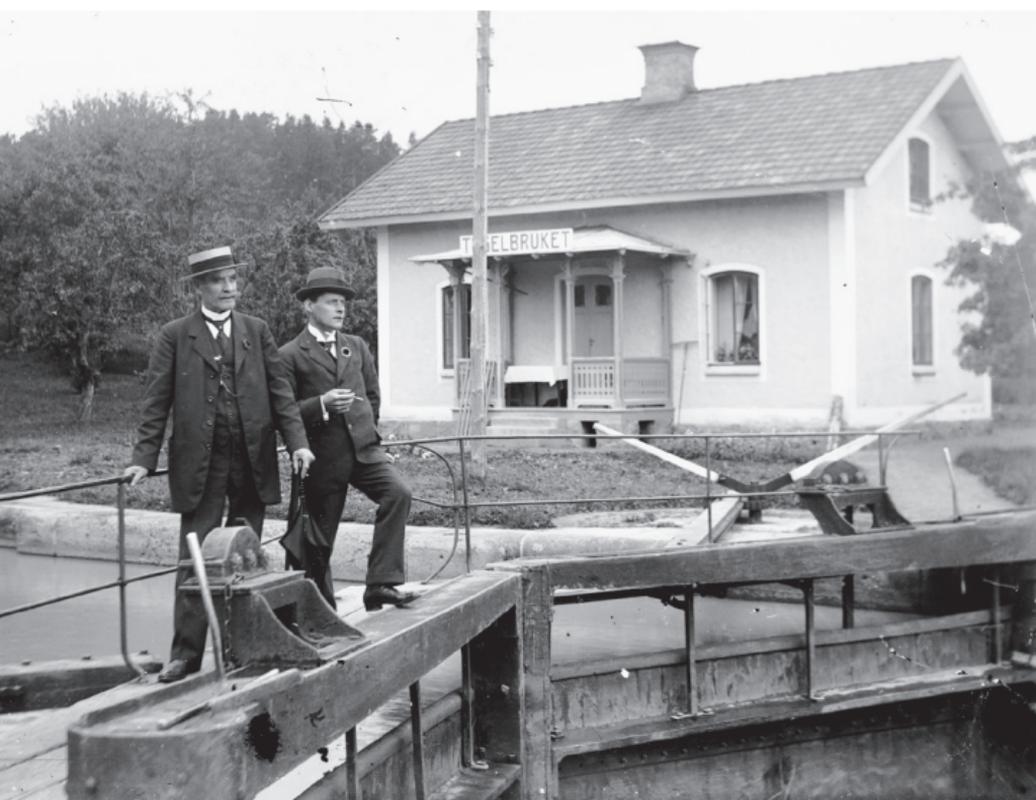
Klevbrinken, Carlsborg upper, Duvkullen Upper, Söderköping and the warehouses in Söderköping.



The Cottages and the Inhabitants

A total of 71 houses were built on the canal grounds for the engineers, inspectors, and keepers, with small barns and outhouses, fields and grazing land. The lock-and bridge-keepers' houses were built after roughly the same template and at the same time as the canal. The current keepers' cottages around Söderköping are mainly from the second building period in 1870–1910. They are mostly built of bricks, plastered or panelled in wood, painted yellow and contains a room and a kitchen and attic rooms. The cottage and warehouse in Mem as well as the warehouses in Söderköping are from the time of the building of the canal in the 1830ies.







Left page:

The lock-keeper's cottage in Mem

The Tegelbruket lock with the new house

The lock area in Söderköping

Right page:

The steamship Söderköping, built in 1897, passing through the lock in Mem in the 1920ies, the lock-keeper's cottage can be glimpsed behind.

The steamship Viktor Rydberg, built in 1885, passing through the lock in Söderköping, the warehouses can be seen to the left.





Mem

Mem

The lock-keeper's cottage was originally built in plastered wood, now it is wood panelled and painted yellow, built in 1833.

Two lock-keepers worked here a long time; Frans Gustafsson, who also was a lighthouse-keeper, worked here for 44 years and was succeeded in 1929 by Per Alvar Stenman, who stayed for 42 years. There was no well by the cottage. Water had to be fetched from a well 500 metres away.

The canal warehouses were built just for the opening of the canal from remains of the workers' huts.

Tegelbruket

The current cottage was built in 1907 and is a plastered wooden building. It was preceded by a smaller cottage, also in plastered wood.



Mem



Tegelbruket

Johan Nykvist was the keeper, and also a gardener, for 32 years, until his son Knut Nykvist took over in 1915. Knut also worked as a carpenter for the Canal company and served for 35 years. In 1952 Knut's son-in-law, Erik Jarlberger succeeded him and served for 28 years. All in all the family worked for 95 years at the lock.

Söderköping

The lock-keeper's cottage was built in 1869–70 of wood. Axel Almgren worked here as lock-keeper from the middle of the 19th century.

There is another lock-keeper's cottage preserved in Söderköping, at Magasinsgatan 8. It is the former cottage from Duvkullen Lower, that was moved here.

The plastered warehouses furthest to the west are built in the 1830ies, while those of wood are built in 1898.



Söderköping



The dockyard, Klevbrinken

Klevbrinken

Two-storied cottage built of wood in 1832. In the area there are other cottages and a workshop from 1907.

The bridge-keeper's cottage of plastered wood was built in 1909. The bridge was replaced by the bascule-bridge on the E22.

Duvkullen Lower

Lock-keeper's cottage from 1899, built of stone. The first cottage was moved to Magasinsgatan 8 in Söderköping.



Klevbrinken



Duvkullen Upper

Lock-keeper's cottage built of wood in 1857. Three generations of the family Stenman lived here and worked for 93 years at the same lock. Per Gustaf Stenman began working in 1881. He was also a stone mason and carpenter. After 22 years he was succeeded by Per Adolf Stenman, also a stone mason. He had 11 children to accommodate in the cottage. The well was 300 metres away. His son Einar Stenman took over as lock-keeper and worked until 1974.





Mariehov

Mariehov

There is a lock-keeper's cottage, built of bricks in 1914 at Mariehov. It is situated between the locks Mariehov Lower and Upper.

Johan A Beckman began working here in 1885 and after his death in 1914, his son Gustaf continued the work until 1955.

Carlsborg Lower

The lock-keeper's cottage is built in 1899 of plastered red bricks. To the west of it is a former kitchen hut, built in Mem in 1877. It was moved here in 1897 to be a temporary dwelling for the lock-keeper.

The storage buildings on the south side are from the beginning of the 19th century. The workshops are



Carlsborg Lower



The lock Carlsborg Lower towards east

from the 1950ies. On the hill above the storage is a yellow large building of wood, formerly the house for the engineer. The house is from the 18th century and was purchased when the building of the canal was about to start in the 1820ies.

The family Ringström worked here as lock-keepers for 98 years. Johan Melcher Ringström began working here in 1881 and was succeeded by his son Torsten Eilert in 1926. Torsten's son, Dag Eilert Ringström took over in 1965. When the last of the family quit working in 1979 the lock became hydraulically operated.

Carlsborg Upper

The cottage is built in 1898–99 of plastered bricks.



Carlsborg Upper



Venneberga

Venneberga

There was an iron bridge here from 1830, manned by a bridge-keeper. The cottage is from 1893, when a new house of bricks were built for Filip Beckman, who manned the bridge 1861–1906.

The picture shows the barn.

Loddbby

The first bridge was built in 1827. The current bridge is from 1972.

The cottage built in 1876–77 is made of bricks and plastered yellow. A small barn comes with it.

Klämman

The lock-keeper's cottage is built of bricks and plaste-



Loddbby



red in 1903. It is situated on a hill beside the lock in beautiful surroundings.

Snövelstorp

The current bridge is built in 2016 and replaced a bridge from 1941. The bridge-keeper's cottage was built of bricks in 1878. In 1969 a modern house was built next to it.

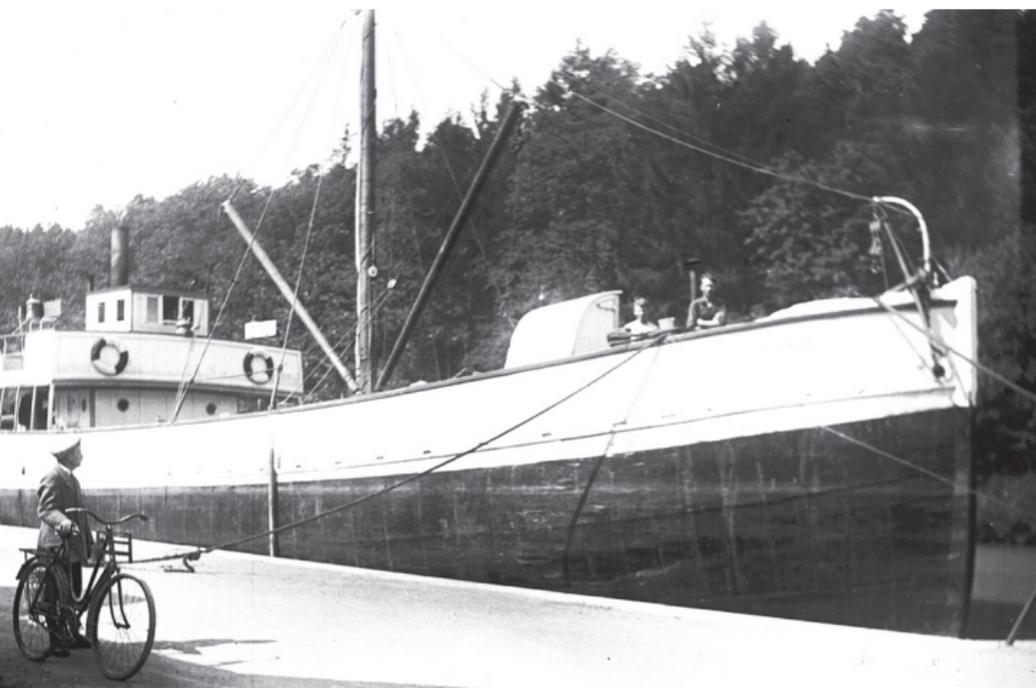
The first bridge-keeper was Abraham Ryberg, who also worked as a carpenter. In 1905 Gustaf Adolf Rydström took over as a bridge-keeper and he stayed for 63 years. He was 88 years old when he quit. When younger he worked as a carpenter during the day and his wife kept the bridge.



From Transportation to Tourism

Sailing on the canal has always been forbidden. The sailing ships had to be towed by horses or oxen. The towpaths were divided into several stages where you could hire towing beasts. There were stones erected every 1000 yards to show how far you had towed.

In the middle of the 19th century engine ships, dedicated paddle-steamers and steam ships driven by propellers came into use on the canal. They carried grain, iron, herring, salt, aquavit and the mail. Later on they mainly carried wood wares, firewood, coal and coke and after the wars mainly sand, cement, bricks and oil. During the 20th century the freight traffic was replaced by the faster railways and lorries.



The passenger traffic began by letting people hop on the freight ships, later there came ships that could accommodate both passengers and cargo. Soon enough dedicated passenger ships were built and in 1869 the cruising business started. The canal steamer Juno was built in 1874 and is still trafficking the canal.

Today thousands of pleasure boats pass through Söderköping on the canal. The old towpaths are used for riding, walking and cycling.

To prevent erosion trees were planted alongside the canal, thus making it the world's longest avenue. In 1865 40 000 willow saplings were planted between Mem and Asplången



Above: The Canal kiosk. Below: "The Ferry".



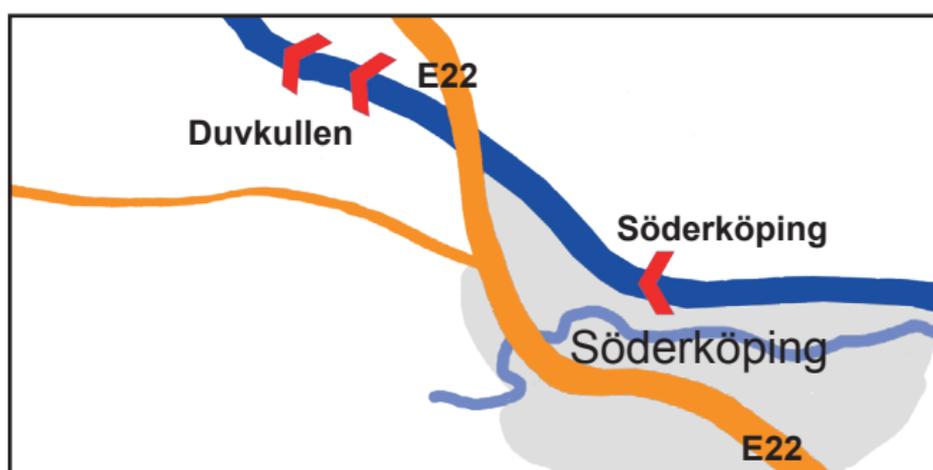
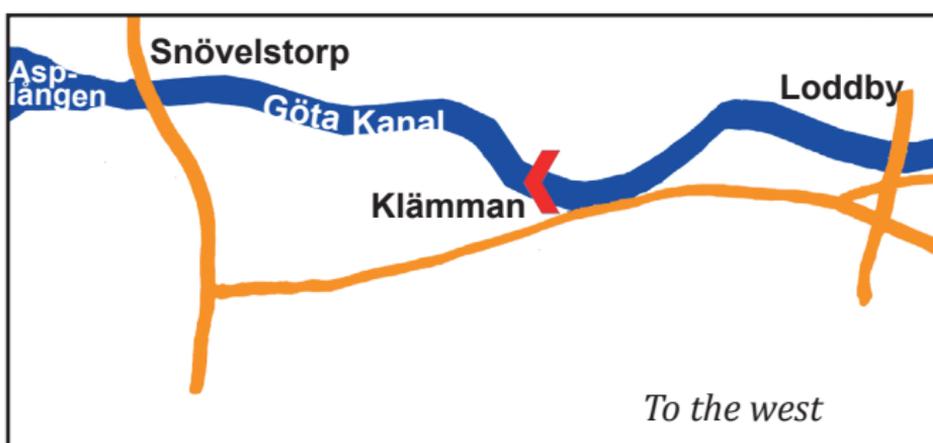
Walking or Cycling to the West

The distance between Söderköping and Snövelstorp is about 11 kilometres. You first pass the artwork "Rabbit Crossing" by Eva Fornåå, part of the art project "Visions by the Water" along the canal.

By Klevbrinken you pass the dry dock, filled with water during the summer and drained in winter, with larger boats put up there. After Klevbrinken there are seven locks and three bridges before the lake Asplången.

The surrounding landscape is beautiful with many remains from mostly the Iron Age, such as burial sites and ancient strongholds. E.g. at Duvkullen there are two burial sites with 50 respectively 35 graves, mainly burial mounds from the Iron Age. Just before Klämman there is a beautiful grazed burial site with 30 mounds in an oak tree setting. At Gäverstad farm, further on, there is a stronghold. At Mariehov you can see on the hill the 2.5-storied mansion, plastered in yellow.

At Venneberga there is a restaurant, a café and a shop.



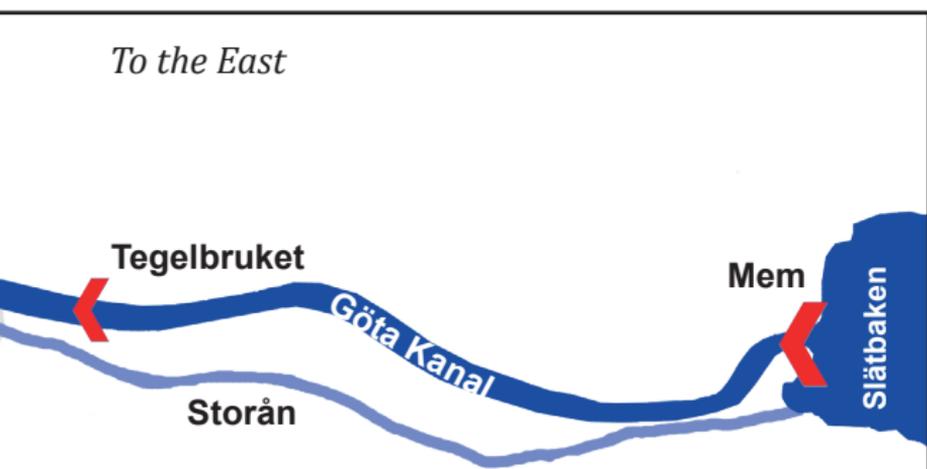
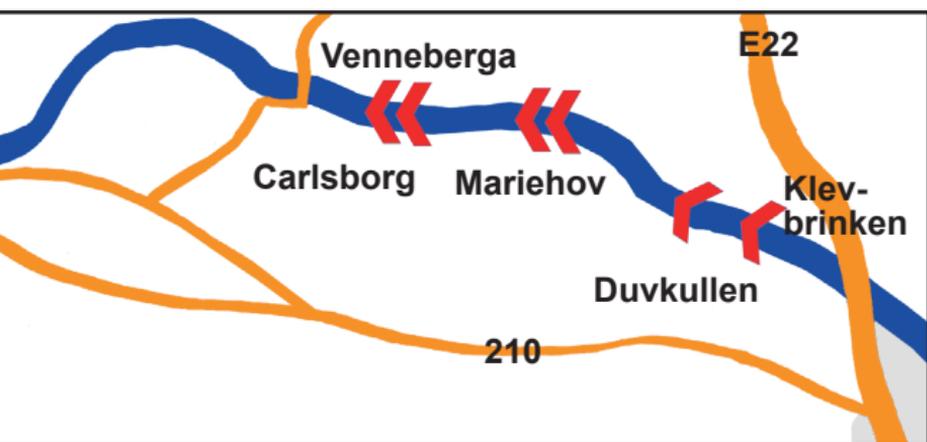
Walking or Cycling to the East

The towpath to Mem is about 6 kilometres long from the lock in Söderköping. On your way there you pass the lock at Tegelbruket. The name derives from the brick yard here during the 18th century. The buildings were demolished when the canal was built. A new brickyard was active at Beatelund 1904–1966. The farm of Beatelund is further to the east, just north of the canal. The main building is an old inn, moved from Mem in the 1860ies.

In Mem there are, beside the lock-keeper's cottage and the warehouses from the 1830ies, a customs warehouse from 1830, a custom house with the custom collector's living quarters built in 1834, the Sea Villa from 1840 and the Canal company's office from 1929. The castle of Mem, with a history from the 16th century, is built by stages between 1780 and 1820. The wings are from 1731.

In Mem there is the artwork "Outpost" by Richard Johansson.

During the summer there is a café in the canal warehouse.





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Söderköpings
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