



What is a meadow, really? A meadow is the land use of harvesting grass without cultivating the soil. It can be wetland edges, shorelines, road verges. On barren ground it is nowadays very rare to see any traces of the old management. On more fertile soils the practise can be seen even nowadays in a few places. A typical meadow on Gotland also has an abundance of trees and bushes.

Traditionally managed meadows on Gotland

Management of wooded meadows

The essential elements of management are: removal of leaves and branches during springtime, cutting, drying and removal of grass during late summer, and grazing during autumn. This way of harvesting forage for winter is what constitutes a meadow. In the traditional managing of this type of meadow, the cutting back of trees and bushes was central. Wood and leaves were important resources in winter. The trees provided an opportunity to regulate the amount of sun and heat to the ground which means a type of risk diversification: dry summers the harvest on open patches are low, and the more shaded patches become important. In wet summers the other way around. The lopped trees were harshly cut back every year. But today the trees and bushes in mostly have been allowed to grow larger.

Cutting, drying and removal of grass during late summer, and grazing during autumn was a central part of the old agricultural system covering about 30 000 hectares on Gotland. It involved many people and meant vast amounts of working hours. Today the trees and bushes have been allowed to grow larger, as they are no longer put to use.

Meadows on Gotland today

Currently around 200 meadows are managed in a traditional way on Gotland, covering some 350 hectares. They represent important historical windows, giving us an idea of the ancient cultural landscape on Gotland. There is a rich cultural heritage to be found in them, and they are also important refuges for plants, animals and fungi that have been rendered homeless by modern land use.

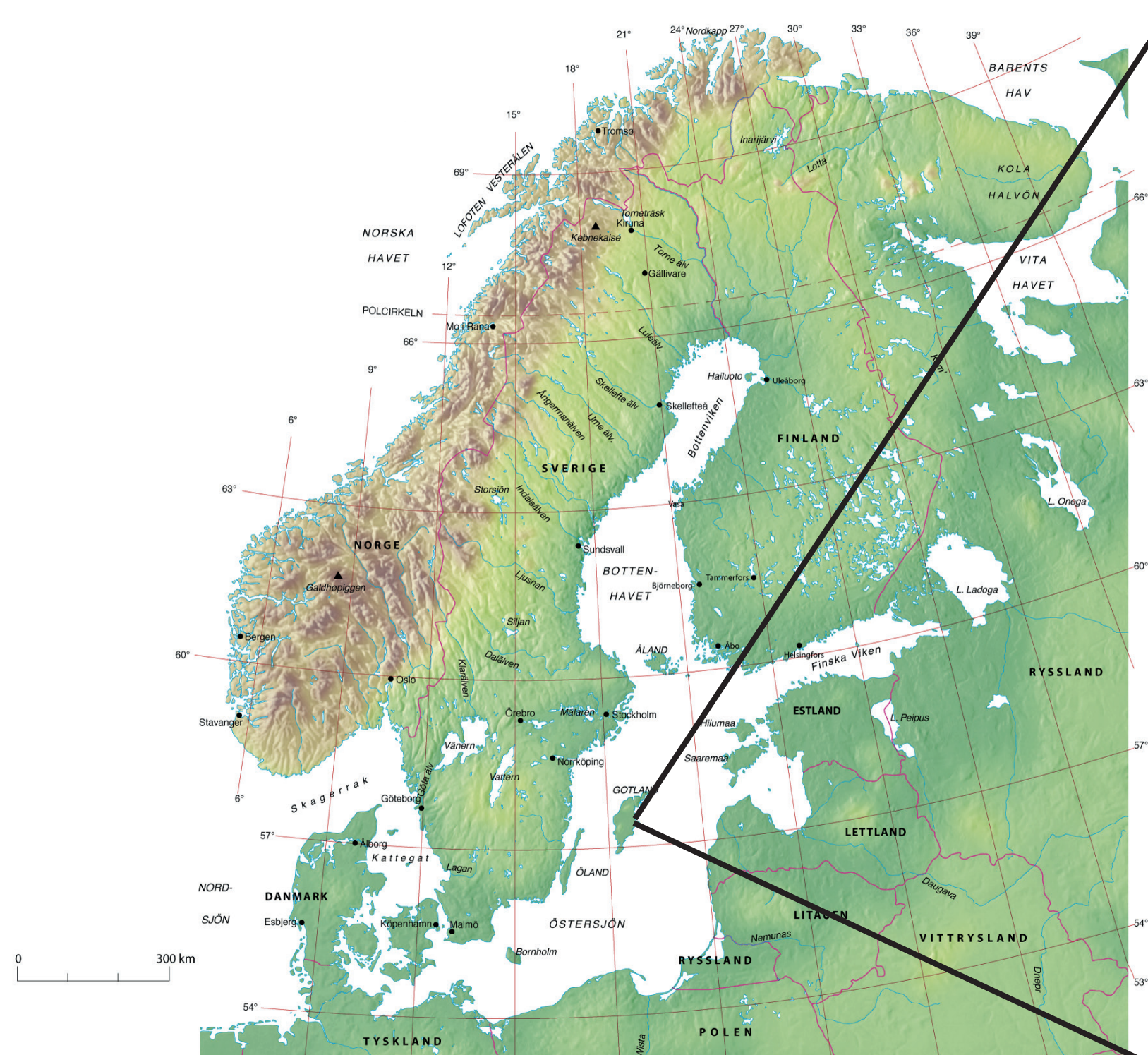
Challenges for the future

Fungi-infected oak, elm and ash trees constitute a severe setback. In some areas, the ash trees have been almost completely eradicated. Thanks to the efforts to control the Dutch elm disease, the elms have been better off. However, the future for the elms on Gotland is uncertain. Oak seem to go through a slower and less drastic process.

The future managing depends on the few people that continue the hay-making. Only 20 meadows are protected, and in these the county administration board has taken the responsibility to secure future management.



Gotländska Ångskommittén



More information: www.gotlandsangar.se/meadows-on-gotland-info