

# **HIKING IN NORWAY – SOUTH**



#### About the Author

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## HIKING IN NORWAY – SOUTH

### THE 10 BEST MULTI-DAY TREKS

by Ute Koninx

**CICERONE**

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*To my family*

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






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*Front cover:* Hiker scaling the Besseggen ridge in Jotunheimen (Route 1, Stage 1)

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### Route symbols on map extracts

	trail			mountain hut (served/self-served/unserved)
	alternative trail			other accommodation
	route direction			trees/forest
	start point			fells
	alternate start point			high fells/alpine
	finish point			
	start/finish point			

SCALE: 1:200,000

0 kilometres 2 4  
0 miles 2

All maps in this guide are at a scale of 1:200,000 unless otherwise marked

### GPX files

for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/975/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/975/GPX)

## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### International distress signal (emergency only)

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### Emergency telephone numbers

If telephoning from the UK the dialling codes are:  
Norway: 0047

Police and rescue coordination tel 112; Fires and major accidents tel 110;  
Ambulance medical emergencies tel 113

Norway - Search and Rescue

South Norway, Hovedredningsentralen Sør Norge, Flyplassveien 160, 4055 Sola  
Emergency number: tel 51 51 70 00

### Weather reports and warnings

[www.yr.no](http://www.yr.no) weather information provided by public broadcaster NRK and Norwegian Meteorological Institute; [www.varsom.no/en](http://www.varsom.no/en) for avalanche, landslide and weather warnings

**Always be adequately insured. Mountain rescue is free in Norway, but follow up health costs could be very expensive.**



Mjølkedalstinden's secondary top, as seen from Olavsbu (Route 3, Stage 1)



OVERVIEW MAP



## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Route	Length (km)	Stages	Max altitude (m)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Page no.
<b>Jotunheimen</b>						35
1 Besseggen	41	3	1743	2060	1990	43
2 Classic	97	6	2469	5220	5225	54
3 Traverse	51	4	2068	2450	2635	83
<b>Rondane</b>						97
4 Summits	85	5	2178	4200	4200	104
5 Traverse	74	4	1429	2440	2510	123
<b>Dovre fjell</b>						149
6 Traverse	80	5	2286	2990	3750	156
<b>Trollheimen</b>						183
7 Trekanten	59	3	1325	2295	2295	190
8 SignaTur	152	8	1669	6750	6750	206
9 Fells to fjord	55	3	1175	1855	2525	235
<b>Ryfylke</b>						247
10 Lysefjord	84	7	1143	5785	5655	254

## AUTHOR PREFACE

Hiking in Norway will leave you breathless in so many ways. Its fjords, mountains, moors and glacial valleys, together with the play of wind, light and weather, bring forth dramatic and marvellous sights to hikers wherever they go. The diversity, accessibility and relative ease of navigation are unmatched in Europe. At the same time, you can get a sense of a tantalising wilderness and be as remote and feel as challenged as you desire in this vast and largely unspoilt country.

The hiking season is short, but with the long daylight hours, these summer and early autumn days seemingly go on forever, and are the perfect time for epic journeys through Norway's incredible nature.

No wonder, then, that hiking and an active outdoor life are engrained in Norwegian culture and heritage. The 'right to roam' is given by law to every individual in the country – a public treasure that can be enjoyed and cherished by those who venture out to make it their own.

A good level of fitness is required as well as map-reading skills and the ability and gear to endure changing weather patterns. Otherwise, hiking in Norway in summer does not require specialist equipment and can be done by a variety of people. Chances are, you'll see this for yourself in the evenings. Relaxing together with local Norwegian hikers in the mountain huts adds another dimension to your hiking experience. Exchanging stories and sharing the passion for the natural surroundings over a game of cards or a cup of tea often forms a convivial end to the day.

The treks in this book cover major hiking areas of Southern Norway and as a whole give an overview of the finest multi-day hiking adventures, be they well-known classic treks or lesser-known gems. Hopefully, they will entice you to discover this wonderful country for yourself.

*God tur!*

*Ute Koninx*



*Langglupbekken waterfall with Rondslottet in the background (Routes 4 and 5)*



## INTRODUCTION



*View over Fannaråkbreen glacier into Sognefjellet (Route 3, Stage 3)*

### **NORWAY – A HIKER'S PARADISE**

Southern Norway extends from Kristiansand in the south to Trondheim in the middle of Norway. The fjords and mountain ranges, fish-rich rivers and lakes and superb hunting grounds made the country popular with the earliest tourists and travellers from Continental Europe in the late 19th century. So much so that English mountaineers were among the first to scale many peaks and German aristocracy liked to come for their summer holidays. Much has changed since then – and yet in some ways very little has changed. The natural beauty and magnificent views that attracted the early tourists awe today's hikers as much as if not more than before.

Much of Norway seems untouched by human activity, and once hiking you will invariably learn that it is firmly in the realm of the natural forces that have shaped it: primarily water and wind. Of course, you will not be alone if you are scaling mighty Galdhøpiggen (Route 2, Stage 4), hiking towards the unique Kjeragbolten boulder (Route 10, Stage 4) or crossing the iconic Besseggen ridge (Route 1, Stage 1). They are popular for a reason, but worth your while nonetheless and therefore included within routes in this guide. However, many route stages will have you hiking in solitude for most of the time, meeting few on the trail as you marvel at the panoramas around you.



The stages of each route are designed to end at mountain huts, providing warmth, companionship and comfort at the end of the day. Having said that, it is perfectly possible to hike with a tent, should you wish. Spending time outdoors is part of Norwegian culture.

This guidebook presents a total of 10 multi-day routes, from shorter three-day treks to longer expeditions that require more planning, commitment and stamina. Almost all routes require you to have a head for heights at times. With the exception of the Lysefjord route in Ryfylke that takes you around one of the most beautiful fjords in western Norway, all of the routes are in (high) alpine terrain, with the associated rewards and challenges.

### GEOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The Norwegian mountains are often thought to be the remnant of a high mountain range, formed some 450 million years ago and since eroded

down to current heights. However, this theory has recently been challenged by the discovery that the continental crust underneath is too thin to have supported such a mountain range, and the scientific community is divided as to the actual origin of the Norwegian mountains.

What we do know is that the mountain range has been shaped and moulded during the Quaternary period of the last 2.5 million years. Southern Norway was covered by immense amounts of snow and ice for half of that time; warmer periods led to glacial movements and snowmelts that needed to be discharged into gigantic rivers, shaping the magnificent landscapes that we can see today. The country is marked by fjords that cut deep into the land, as well as mountain ranges and tundra-like plateaus, permafrost and glaciers, leaving only 4% that can be used for agricultural purposes. It has one of the lowest population densities in Europe, and this is concentrated in coastal

areas, especially the Oslo fjord. Once you leave towns and villages behind, you will find yourself very quickly in a remote and unspoilt country, with millions of years of geological history under your feet. (If you're interested, for more information see Geological Survey of Norway, [www.ngu.no](http://www.ngu.no) – also in English.)

### HERITAGE AND OUTDOOR CULTURE

Norwegians have been living in this rugged and often inhospitable landscape for thousands of years, becoming experts at making a living in harsh and difficult conditions. By the end of the 19th century, all the land suitable for agricultural purposes had been developed, and this often included remote farms in faraway mountain valleys. Today, some of these former summer pastures and alms form part of the vast network of mountain huts around the country. The centuries-old drover trails that connected these hamlets have become part of the network of trails that criss-cross the mountains. While hiking in Southern Norway you will find yourself in some of the most beautiful and varied terrain. Expect to be able to walk over and around mountaintops, around glaciers, along streams and lakes in generally magnificent and stunning scenery, where, depending on the route and time chosen, you might be accompanied by many or by none.

Foraging, fishing and hunting are seen by many as part of the traditional Norwegian way of life. You might well come across hunters and fishermen who will only consume meat or fish that they've caught. Norwegians like to feel connected to nature, and they have a word in their vocabulary that sums up all these experiences into one: *friluftsliv*. While untranslatable, it encompasses all the activities around the outdoors that an individual might enjoy. In the context of hiking in the mountains, this extends to berry picking and other foraging activities, hunting and fishing. The *Allemannsretten*, translated as 'public right of access', covers these activities in a law, essentially allowing the individual to walk and hike everywhere in open country and unfenced land, without restriction, regardless of land ownership (search 'right to roam' on the official website of Visit Norway, [www.visitnorway.com](http://www.visitnorway.com)). Hunting, as well as fishing in lakes and rivers, does require a permit (see information on [www.inatur.no](http://www.inatur.no)). Trout, perch and char are abundant in many lakes and rivers and can supplement your diet on the trail. In Southern Norway you are allowed to pick berries and gather mushrooms for your own consumption (note that this should only be done if you are truly knowledgeable about mushrooms as some are potentially lethal). See Appendix D for more information on the berries that are common in the region.

Erratics from the last ice age on the high fells plateau (Route 10, Stage 3)





View from Hellerfossen into the valley of Storådal, with Knutsholstinden and Mesmogtinden rising beyond (Route 2, Stage 6)

might apply for car parking, and that cars might attract a toll payment when access is by small private service road. Memurubu and Gjendebu can be reached by boat, while Olavsbu, Fannaråki and Skogedalsbøen can be reached on foot only.

Memurubu, Spiterstulen, Leirvassbu and Turtagrø are not DNT huts, but you are likely to get a discount as a DNT member. Note that prices are generally slightly higher in these privately run huts. Of all the huts, only Olavsbu, in the heart of Jotunheimen, is a self-serviced hut where you cater for yourself and where you need the DNT key to enter. All other huts are fully serviced. Note that Gjendesheim is one of the most visited DNT cabins in Norway – understandably, given its proximity to the spectacular Besseggen hike and its easy accessibility by car and bus. A reservation in the main season is recommended.

#### THE ROUTES IN JOTUNHEIMEN

Three Jotunheimen routes are presented in this guide. The Besseggen route (Route 1) takes in the famous Besseggen ridge, then continues along Gjende lake towards Bygdin lake: A short, flexible, but challenging introduction to the Jotunheimen national park. The ‘classic’ route (Route 2) is a six-day circuit bringing you across the highest tops and along the broad glacial valleys. Both this trek and the Besseggen can be extended with the traverse route (Route 3), which brings you across to the high peaks in the west of the national park. You should feel confident to either follow any of the routes as described or design your itinerary to suit your wishes. For example, Route 1 can be done in a long weekend, while combining Route 2 with Route 3 means you could be hiking for almost two weeks through pristine landscapes.

## ROUTE 1

### *Jotunheimen Besseggen route*

<b>Start</b>	Gjendesheim mountain hut
<b>Finish</b>	Fondsbu mountain hut
<b>Distance</b>	41km (25.5 miles)
<b>Ascent</b>	2060m
<b>Descent</b>	1990m
<b>Time</b>	3 days
<b>Extensions</b>	Connects to Route 3 after Stage 3
<b>Variations</b>	The route can be shortened to a one- or two-stage hike by exiting after Stage 1 or 2 by boat back to Gjendesheim.

This route is a perfect introduction to Jotunheimen, especially if you are short on time. At only 4½hr by bus from Oslo, you can be enjoying the Oslo fjords in the morning and experience the Jotunheimen alpine mountains in the afternoon. The route can be exited or entered at any of its three stages, and it can be extended as well, giving a lot of flexibility. It features the famous and memorable Besseggen ridge, while also including much quieter stages, where the great panoramas of Jotunheimen’s unique character of high alpine and snow-covered tops, lush and flowering valleys, and steep mountainsides with cascading waterfalls can be enjoyed. Among this wonderful nature stand some of the oldest and most characterful mountain huts in Norway.

The route starts with the unique ‘vertigo hike’ over the Besseggen ridge between Gjendesheim and Memurubu mountain huts. On a sunny day you’ll see the Gjende and Bessvatnet lakes shimmering emerald-green and deep blue. Besseggen, with its spectacular panoramic views, is one of Norway’s most famous hikes, and accordingly visited by many. Most hikers walk it in an easterly direction, climbing the ridge, but the author prefers the other direction. Provided you are vertigo-proof, the descent has better views and the significant advantage of going against the crowd. The second stage continues from Memurubu to Gjendebu at the western end of Gjende lake, a day in which you will likely meet far fewer hikers on the trail. Many vistas await you, including that across Gjende lake as well as the high mountain peaks and their various glaciers, such as Knutsholstinden (2341m) and Tjønholstinden (2331m) – even the Hurrungane range (2406m) in the far west. There are two options for the descent to Gjendebu mountain hut: one is very steep with tight switchbacks that makes use of chains at times, while the other option is a gentler, longer valley walk. Day three of the

route takes you to Fondsbu on Bygdin lake – the second large lake in Jotunheimen and just as mesmerising with its emerald-green colour. Along with superb alpine views, lovely meadows and a roaring waterfall, you end at one of the best possible Norwegian mountain huts for afternoon tea.

Access to Gjendesheim is by public express bus (Valdresekspressen) from Oslo or bus from Otta or Lom.

You can shorten this route, both at Memurubu and Gjendebu, by taking the boat on Gjende lake back to Gjendesheim, after Stage 1 or 2. Similarly, if you are prone to vertigo, you can skip the ridge walk and start at Memurubu instead. For boat timings and online tickets see [www.gjende.no/en](http://www.gjende.no/en). Booking is recommended in season, and pre-booked ticket holders have priority for boarding. The trek also connects in Fondsbu (at the end of Stage 3) to the Jotunheimen traverse route (Route 3), allowing you to extend by four days. At Fondsbu you can exit by boat over Bygdin lake to Bygdin village (there's a regular summer boat service on the M/B Bitihorn – see <https://jvb.no/en>) and connect by bus to Oslo; or take the bus to Tyinkrysset for further connections (see Figure 1 for details).

## STAGE 1

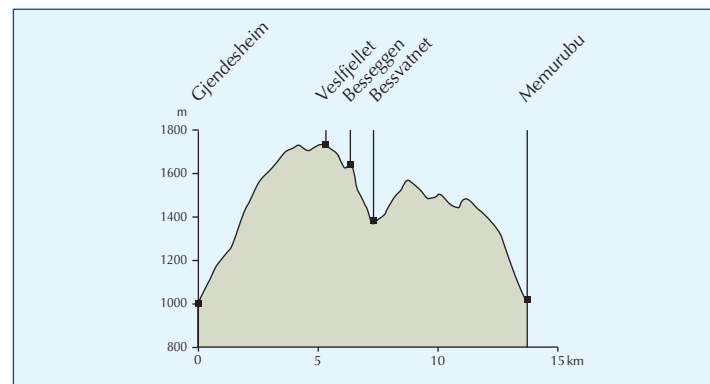
### Besseggen ridge

<b>Start</b>	Gjendesheim mountain hut
<b>Finish</b>	Memurubu mountain hut
<b>Distance</b>	14km (8.75 miles)
<b>Ascent</b>	980m
<b>Descent</b>	965m
<b>Difficulty</b>	Challenging
<b>Time</b>	6hr
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1743m
<b>Map</b>	Nordeca Jotunheimen Aust 1:50,000 Nr 2503

'Sheer and sharp as the blade of a scythe' (from *Peer Gynt*, by Henrik Ibsen). The hike over the Besseggen ridge is one of a handful of famous 'vertigo hikes' in Norway. The path on the narrowest section of the ridge is steep and airily exposed to Bessvatnet lake (300m below) and Gjende lake (700m below). It narrows to just a few metres in width. If you are happy to use

hands and feet at times and are not afraid of heights, this is a once-in-a-lifetime hike and scramble. The views are nothing short of spectacular and unequalled anywhere else in Norway. It has become a popular hike, with around 30,000 visitors a year making the journey. Start early if you want to hike with less company.

In season (June to September), there are mostly day hikers. Most will take the morning boat from Gjendesheim to Memurubu and hike back, in order to climb rather than descend the ridge. The boat also acts as a baggage transport service for trekkers who would prefer to hike the ridge with only a daypack. It will drop your luggage at the quay in Memurubu (leaving it protected under canvas) for you to collect at the end of the hike. See [www.gjende.no/en](http://www.gjende.no/en) for details.



Exit **Gjendesheim mountain hut** and cross over the main service road. The path is well marked throughout. It goes straight and steeply up as you quickly leave behind low-level vegetation. After 1km a signpost marks the split of routes to Memurubu and Bessheim: continue the Memurubu trail, climbing towards the left.

The path ascends steadily for the next 3km, with chains provided at one point to help on slippery rocks. The terrain is covered by mosses and lichen, and the trail is mostly a gravel path. The path reaches the highest point of the stage, marked by a truly humongous cairn, at the top of **Veslfjellet** (1743m).

As you start walking down towards the Besseggen ridge it comes into view slowly, and then suddenly quite dramatically. The panoramic views on a sunny



day are really unique and quite magnificent. The **Besseggen ridge** is an arête and is only a few metres wide at its narrowest point, making it akin to walking on a knife's edge.

The colour of the waters of **Gjende** and **Bessvatnet** lakes give away their origins. Gjende, being fed by glaciers, is a green-and-emerald colour, while Bessvatnet is not glacier-fed and is therefore a deep blue. Bessvatnet is extremely low in nutrients, making it exceptionally clear with water visibility well above 25m.

The lakes are enclosed by high peaks jutting into the sky. Among them are Veslfjellet (1743m) and Besshøe (2258m) as well as Store Knutsholstinden (2341m) and Skarvflytindane (2154m), to name just a few. The rugged Hurrungane range is visible in the far west. Due to the differences in height and orientation, the microclimates around both lakes are quite different, giving rise to great contrasts in early summer, when Bessvatnet can still be frozen while Gjende lake has thawed.



A 'T' marker on the Besseggen ridge

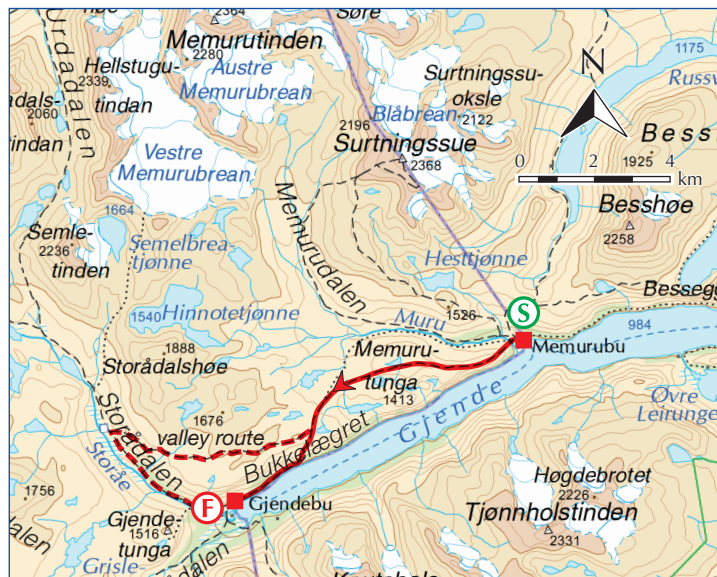
Descend the ridge with care until you reach the shore of **Bessvatnet lake** – a perfect spot for lunch or even a swim on a sunny day. Continuing west, the next 2km towards Memurubu takes you initially through undulating terrain, with a short sharp climb before you meet the signs to Glitterheim and Memurubu huts. As you continue towards Memurubu hut the trail narrows and steepens, especially over the last 2km. Having spent most of the day in the high alpine zone, you finish the hike through dense valley vegetation while descending into the valley and finally reaching **Memurubu**.

## STAGE 2

### Memurubu to Gjendebu

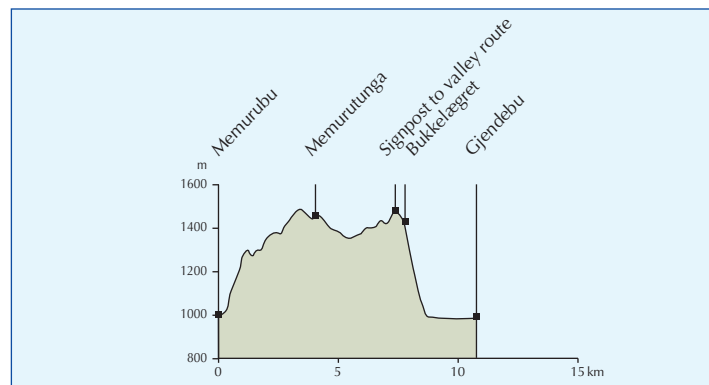
Start	Memurubu mountain hut
Finish	Gjendebu mountain hut
Distance	10.75km (6.75 miles)
Ascent	640m
Descent	660m
Difficulty	Challenging
Time	4hr
Maximum altitude	1484m
Map	Nordeca Jotunheimen Aust 1:50,000 Nr 2503

With sweeping views over an array of tops above 2000m in all directions, this hike is considered by some to be one of the finest in Jotunheimen. In good weather the Memurubu peaks show in-between their extensive glaciers and seem to be within reach. The descent to Gjendebru is steep and challenging, but this can be avoided by taking a longer route along Storådalens valley (adding 6km/2hr to the stage). Otherwise, this is a short and charming stage, with excellent waymarking making navigation easy.



Leave the main hut at **Memurubu** and turn right (or if you arrived by boat, follow the dirt road up until you pass the entry gate to the property). At the signposts, go straight towards Gjendebru mountain hut and shortly after keep left (again this is signposted) to reach the bridge over the **Muru river**.

Pass an unmarked path that leads to the right along the river and continue on the main trail which goes straight up the Sjugurdinden ridge. The last few metres might be a bit of a scramble. As you gain altitude you will have excellent views of the mountain hut and the milky glacial Muru river emptying into Gjende lake.



The path continues as a ridge walk, steadily climbing in a series of ups and downs, towards the **Memurutunga plateau**. A short 100m detour that rewards with wonderful views takes you off the marked trail at the highpoint, where you can enjoy truly sweeping panoramas to both the north and south over Memurutindane (2367m) and Surtningsssue (2368m), Tjønnholstinden (2331m) and Knutsholstinden (2341m) with hanging glacial valleys over the Gjende lake.

Over the next few kilometres the trail undulates gently, passing numerous picturesque lakes on the plateau. Ignore a trail on the right, signposted back to Memurubu, and continue straight as the last climb towards the Kjuklingen height begins. At the next signpost you have the choice to reach Gjendebru via the longer, gentler walk that goes down along the Storådalens valley, or tackle the steep descent to Gjendebru via the **Bukkelægret** trail. The valley route is a vertigo-safe alternative; it will add about 6km (2hr) to the day and is not further described here.

This trail drops over the next 500m of altitude in steep, tight switchbacks, with a few sections where you should



View from the top of Bukkelægret along the lake towards Gjendebru



make use of the secured chains. This can be quite challenging with heavy backpacks and care should be taken in rainy or icy conditions. The marked path is the only route down. Once this descent is behind you, it's a pleasant 2.5km walk along the shoreline to the **Gjendebu mountain hut**. Should you wish, you can leave Gjendebu by boat towards Memurubu or Gjendesheim mountain huts – see [www.gjende.no/en](http://www.gjende.no/en) for details.

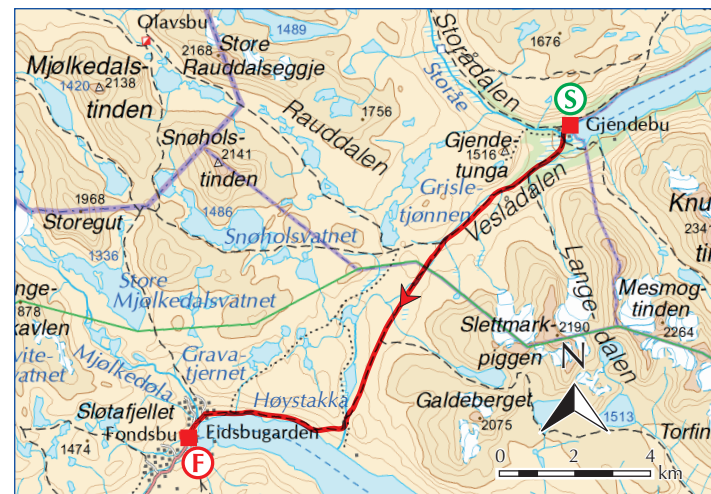
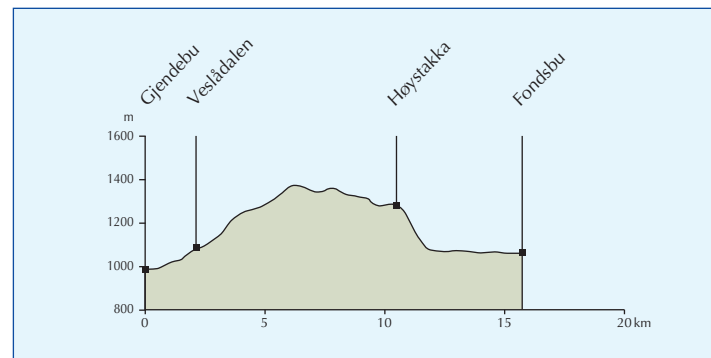
**Gjendebu** is the DNT's oldest hiking lodge, built in 1871, and you can visit some of the historic buildings on the grounds. That same year, in 1871, a girl named Gjendine was born here. She spent many summers on the pastures throughout her 101 years, and she was persuaded by the Norwegian composer Grieg to sing her lullabies to him, so he could capture the melodies in one of his now best-known compositions.

### STAGE 3

#### Gjendebu to Fondsbu

Start	Gjendebu mountain hut
Finish	Fondsbu mountain hut
Distance	15.75km (10 miles)
Ascent	440m
Descent	365m
Difficulty	Challenging
Time	5hr
Maximum altitude	1374m
Map	Nordecia Jotunheimen Vest 1:50,000 Nr 2505 and Nordecia Jotunheimen Aust 1:50,000 Nr 2503

This third and final stage, which stretches between Jotunheimen's two largest lakes, is a hike of medium difficulty with some more challenging sections. It is easy underfoot as you slowly climb the Veslådalen valley from Gjendebu. The hike then offers phenomenal views as you descend towards Bygdin lake, with a backdrop of the short but powerful Høystakka river thundering downwards. It is worth arriving in Fondsbu mountain hut in time for their delicious afternoon tea offerings of waffles with jam and sour cream or cinnamon buns.



Leaving **Gjendebu mountain hut**, turn left to find a signpost, and take the left fork towards Fondsbu. Follow the path as it crosses the bridge and enters the meadows in the delta of the Storåe river. The few cattle that are often seen grazing in the distance are a reminder of the importance of these summer meadows for farmers in pre-industrial times.

At the next signposted fork, keep right and follow the trail through the dense valley vegetation. You'll pass many delightful campsites along the valley. Make