

TREKKING THE KUNGSLEDEN



About the Author

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TREKKING THE KUNGSLEDEN

THE KING'S TRAIL THROUGH NORTHERN SWEDEN

by Mike Laing

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Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/982/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: Striding out on the open fell above Saltoluokta (Stage 9)

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Glacially polished rock (Stage 5)

Mountain safety

Walking in mountainous and remote areas has its dangers, and those regions 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

Emergency service: 112

Non-emergency police support: 11414















Non-emergency health advice: 1177

Weather reports

There are no telephone weather services in Sweden that would be of use to walkers. All STF *fjällstugor* and *fjällstationer* have access to the latest forecasts and post these in communal areas. Even if you are not staying at STF facilities, the staff will be only too happy to provide the latest weather information as you pass through.

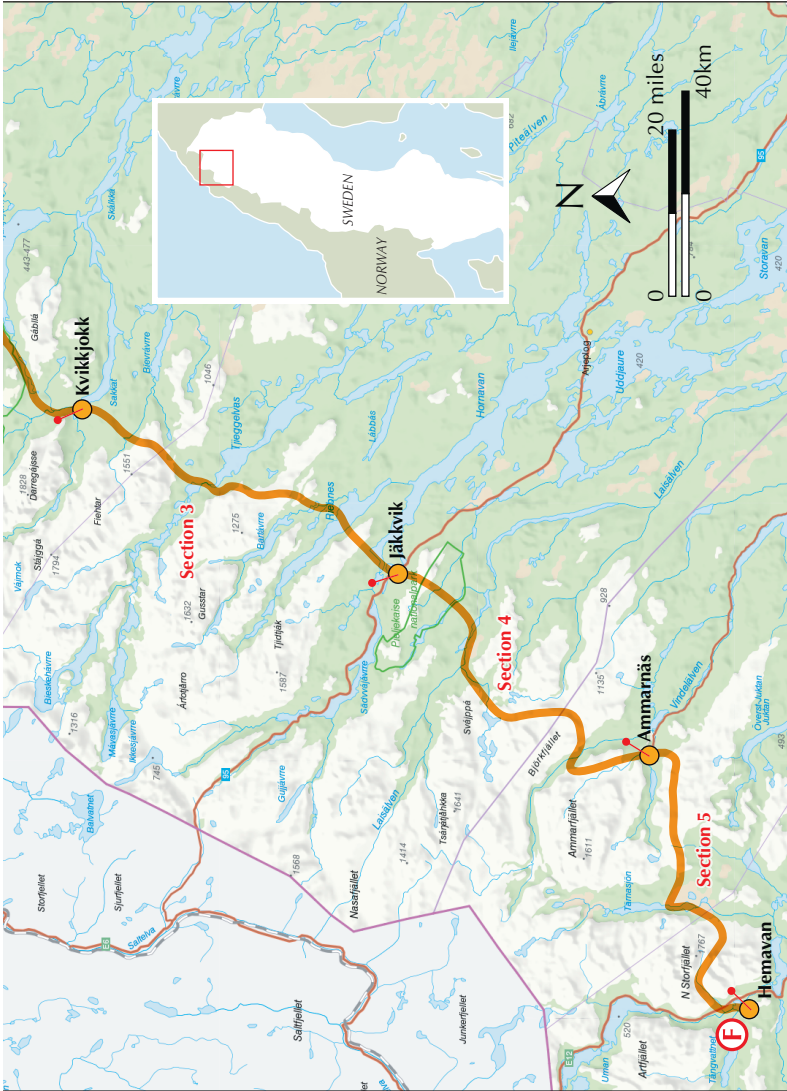
Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.

Route symbols on map extracts

-  route
-  alternative route
-  link route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  start/finish point
-  STF fjällstation/lodge
-  STF fjällstuga/hut
-  non-STF fjällstuga/hut
-  hostel/self-catering
-  campsite
-  railway station
-  shelter/day hut
-  Emergency telephone

GPX files

for all routes can be downloaded free at
www.cicerone.co.uk/982/GPX



ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Stage	Distance (km)	Ascent/Descent (m)	Time	Page
Section 1 – Abisko to Saltoluokta				53
Stage 1	Abisko to Abiskojaure	13.3 115/10	4hr 50min	60
Stage 2	Abiskojaure to Alesjaure	20.3 345/55	6hr 50min	67
Stage 3	Alesjaure to Tjåktja	13.1 265/30	4hr 45min	74
Stage 4	Tjåktja to Sälka	12.5 115/315	4hr 30min	79
Stage 5	Sälka to Singi	11.6 70/165	4hr 20min	85
Stage 6	Singi to Kaitumjaure	12.2 55/155	4hr 30min	90
Stage 7	Kaitumjaure to Teusajaure	8.6 200/320	3hr 30min	95
Stage 8	Teusajaure to Saltoluokta via Vakkotavare	13.7 480/510	4hr 50min	100
Total walking		105.3 1645/1560	38hr 05min	
Non-walking (boat crossings and bus)		30.7 -	-	
Section totals		136 1645/1560	8 days	
Section 2 – Saltoluokta to Kvikkjokk				127
Stage 9	Saltoluokta to Sitojaure	19.3 425/185	6hr 30min	131
Stage 10	Sitojaure to Aktse	8.3 325/395	3hr 20min	137
Stage 11	Aktse to Pärte	19.1 420/490	6hr 50min	144
Stage 12	Pärte to Kvikkjokk	15.2 90/260	5hr 20min	151
Total walking		61.9 1260/1330	22hr	
Non-walking (boat crossings)		6.6 -	-	
Section totals		68.5 1260/1330	4 days	
Section 3 – Kvikkjokk to Jäkkvik				157
Stage 13	Kvikkjokk to Tsielekjåhkå	11.9 480/190	4hr 30min	161
Stage 14	Tsielekjåhkå to Gistojåvråttj	17.6 330/440	6hr	167
Stage 15	Gistojåvråttj to Gásakláhko	19.7 540/150	6hr 40min	172
Stage 16	Gásakláhko to Vuonatjviken	12.9 20/400	4hr 40min	177
Stage 17	Vuonatjviken to Jäkkvik	16.4 435/515	5hr 40min	182
Total walking		78.5 1805/1695	27hr 30min	
Non-walking (boat crossings)		9.1 -	-	
Section totals		87.6 1805/1695	5 days	

Stage	Distance (km)	Ascent/Descent (m)	Time	Page
Section 4 – Jäkkvik to Ammarnäs				189
Stage 18	Jäkkvik to Luvtvårre	13.2 450/290	4hr 45min	193
Stage 19	Luvtvårre to Bäverholmen	14.4 120/260	5hr	199
Stage 20	Bäverholmen to Tjiegnetisjåvrrie	20 360/120	6hr 45min	205
Stage 21	Tjiegnetisjåvrrie to Rävfalls	21.3 260/460	7hr	211
Stage 22	Rävfalls to Ammarnäs	22.2 490/570	7hr 20min	217
Section totals		91.1 1680/1700	5 days (30hr 50min walking)	
Section 5 – Ammarnäs to Hemavan				225
Stage 23	Ammarnäs to Aigert	7.4 390/20	3hr 10min	229
Stage 24	Aigert to Serve	19.2 575/655	6hr 30min	233
Stage 25	Serve to Tärnasjö	13.6 365/465	4hr 50min	238
Stage 26	Tärnasjö to Syter	14.2 135/35	5hr	242
Stage 27	Syter to Viterskals	12.4 280/190	4hr 30min	246
Stage 28	Viterskals to Hemavan	10.3 130/380	4hr	251
Section totals		77.1 1875/1745	6 days (28hr walking)	
Walking totals		413.9 8265/8030	146hr 15min	
Overall total		460.3 8265/8030	146hr 15min	
Note: Timings for bus and boat crossing have not been included in totals.				
Additional itinerary 1 – Singi to Nikkaluokta				107
Day 1	Singi to Kebnekaise STF Fjällstation	14.1 200/260	5hr	108
Day 2	Kebnekaise STF Fjällstation to Nikkaluokta	17.9 130/310	6hr	114
Totals		32 330/570	2 days (11hr walking)	
Additional itinerary 2 – Kebnekaise summit				120
Kebnekaise STF Fjällstation to summit (round trip)		17.4 1720/1720	10hr	120



INTRODUCTION



The Kaitumjåkka River seen from the south bank (Stage 7)

Sweden's Kungsleden (or King's Trail) embodies a diverse and unique walking experience whether it is taken in its entirety or just in part. Since its foundation in the early 20th Century by the Swedish Tourist Association (STF) the trail has grown and developed a section at a time from Abisko southwards to its current terminus in Hemavan, a total distance of 460km. For those visiting Sweden, Lappland and the Arctic for the first time the Kungsleden will be a grand adventure and a step into a new world; for many it will be the start of a long and rich association involving many repeated visits.

The Kungsleden is as varied as the Arctic wilderness is vast, traversing

snow-topped mountain ranges, expansive open fell, verdant forests and crossing lakes both large and small. The trail begins by passing through the rugged Lapone Mountains, home to Kebnekaise, Sweden's highest peak at 2098m (which can be summited by means of a detour from the Abisko to Nikkaluokta circuit – described in Additional itinerary 2). Like all long-distance trails the Kungsleden seeks the simplest line and in doing so traverses the Tjåktjavagge, a 30km glacial valley with magnificent views along its entire length. Further south the landscape softens to embrace open fell and the pristine lakes at Kaitumjaure and Teusajaure. At Aktse

the famous hay meadows are perfectly framed by the azure Låjtávrra delta and the sheer chiselled face of Skierffe. Beyond Kvikkjokk the trail becomes much quieter as it negotiates the empty fells and forest as far as Jäkkvik. On leaving Bäverholmen the trail climbs onto the Arjeplog Fells, an extensive and tranquil area much favoured by fishermen and naturalists alike. A brief and tantalising taste of Vindelälven precedes arrival into Ammarnäs, home to a beautiful amber coloured wooden church and the famous Potatisbacke (potato hill). On leaving Ammarnäs, open fells are followed as far as Tärnasjön lake after which the Kungsleden finishes as it started, among the mountains. Crossing the perfectly u-shaped Syterskalet valley places you within a day of Hemavan and the finish.

The Kungsleden is a continuous route with five distinct sections, allowing plenty of choice when it comes to how much of the trail you wish, or are able, to undertake. Many walkers limited by time spend a week walking the spectacular 103km from Abisko to Nikkaluokta (Stages 1–5, followed by Additional itinerary 1) through some of the Kungsleden's finest mountain scenery; an itinerary that includes the Tjåktjavagge. Those with more time can link multiple sections or even complete the entire trail, an undertaking requiring between four and five unhurried weeks for the average walker.

Despite the remoteness of the terrain, bridges are provided where needed by the Norrbotten and Västerbotten local councils, as are boardwalks across the roughest

and boggiest ground. Three of the Kungsleden's five sections are furnished with regular STF huts (*fjällstugor*) which offer a range of services and permit the weight-wary to walk with reduced loads. Most *fjällstugor* offer saunas which serve to ease aching muscles and reward you for your day's efforts. From start to finish the trail is very well marked and sign-posted making it straightforward to follow.

For half its length the Kungsleden lies within the Arctic Circle and consequently a large measure of the summer walking season takes place in 24-hour daylight. This is also Sápmi, home of the Sámi people whose close relationship with the reindeer has underpinned their existence since the last ice age. The reindeer are mostly absent during the walking season, although the Sámi are evidenced by their summer villages, their traditional dwellings (*kåtor*), reindeer enclosures (*rengården*) and remote huts.

Lapland is home to a remarkable group of animals including brown bear, wolverine, arctic fox, moose and many others; all are wary of humans and a sighting from the trail is unlikely. As compensation there are many eye-catching Arctic plants to enjoy (and berries to eat) as well as waterfowl and other bird types; if you're lucky you might catch a glimpse of otter, lemming and moose. Along its length the Kungsleden passes through no fewer than five national parks including Sarek whose beautiful snowy

mountains provide a spectacular sight in the distance.

Sweden's *allmansrätten* (everyman's right) allows great freedom to roam in the outdoors and to wild camp, light fires, pick berries and swim in the lakes. This is all part of the joy of the Kungsleden and what makes it such a special experience. You will encounter many Swedes on the trail and their cheerful, friendly and open company does much to enrich the overall experience, as does that of the small communities encountered along the way.

So, this is Sweden's Kungsleden, a colourful, rugged, varied, magnificent and remote walking experience. Although the vast majority of the route is very quiet, certain parts of the trail will feel busy or crowded to some walkers. Luckily, an antidote can be found by camping in the many tranquil spots found along the way. Whatever your level of ability and experience the Kungsleden offers numerous options and a great deal for everyone to enjoy and appreciate.

THE SUBARCTIC ENVIRONMENT

Geography

Sweden has an area of 450,000km² making it the fourth-largest country entirely in Europe. Around 65 per cent of this area is covered in forest and 9 per cent in water. Northern Sweden (or Lapland) provides a spectacular



Swedes in their element

STAGE 1

Abisko to Abiskojaure

Start	Abisko 385m
Finish	Abiskojaure STF Fjällstuga 490m
Distance	13.3km
Ascent	115m
Descent	10m
Grade	Easy
Time	4hr 50min
Terrain	Good trail and boardwalks throughout, some minor ascent. Boardwalks immediately north of the Nissonjokk campsite quickly become inundated following rain
Shelter	Open-sided shelter at Nissonjokk
Camping	Wild – only permitted on the official site at Nissonjokk. Paid – Abiskojaure STF Fjällstuga
Resupply	Shop at Abiskojaure STF Fjällstuga

This relatively short and undemanding first stage is confined to the Abisko National Park, a 77km² area of mountain valley that was established in 1909 and since 1966, has formed part of the larger Torneträsk Biosphere Reserve. The stage is ideal for shaking out, stretching the legs and getting accustomed to the pack. The close proximity of Abisko Turistation to the trail's start means that it is possible, for those that are prepared, to step off the train and begin walking immediately. Many day walkers will be seen on this stage and it is a popular activity to stay in the *fjällstuga* at Abiskojaure overnight, before returning to Abisko the following day. The views are initially confined by the birch forest as the trail closely parallels the Abiskojaäkkä River. The second half of the stage has a more open aspect alongside Abiskojaure Lake where dwarf tree species start to become more prevalent and mountain vistas begin to open up. Camping options within the park are limited to the official site at Nissonjokk.

The trail's start is well signposted and clearly identified by a dedicated wooden gateway which is located 100m south of the E10 and within 5min walk of both the

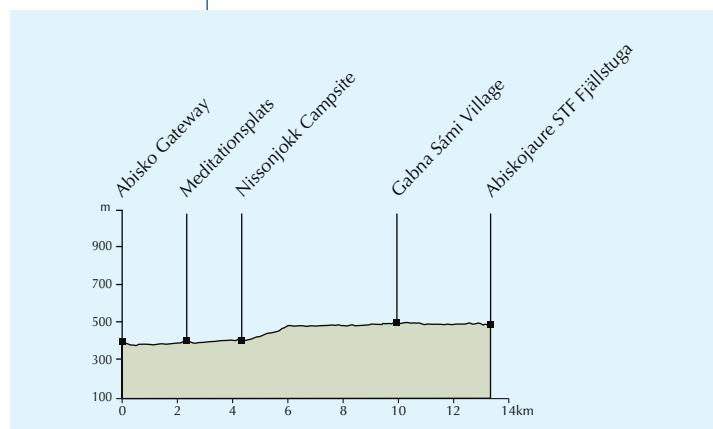


The gateway provides information about Abisko National Park, its regulations, and the meditation trail that will be encountered along the way.

fjällstation and Abisko Turiststation. ◀ From the gateway, follow the wide trail southwards through birch forest, accompanied by the sound of the noisy **Abiskojåkka River**. Although a variety of local trail markers will be seen attached to the trees, follow the red paint markers from the outset. Small glimpses of peaks will be snatched through the birch, but it is not until 1.5km, at a rise over an old dolomite quarry, that the first proper views are to be had. Atop the rise and in a perfect setting overlooking a bend in the river you will find the first of seven *meditationsplatser* (**meditation spots**) that are located along the Dag Hammarskjöld Way between Abisko and Nikkaluokta.

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961) was an accomplished Swedish diplomat who went on to serve as the second UN Secretary General from 1953 to 1961. Killed in an air crash while on a peace mission to the Congo, he is the only Nobel Peace Prize Laureate to have received the award posthumously.

Descend from the quarry and follow long sections of boardwalk provided for negotiating the more boggy



The Abiskojåkka

areas. After 1.5km, cross a metal suspension bridge spanning the Nissonjohka River. The Nissonjohka is a tributary of the Abiskojåkka and here, just before joining the larger river, it flows as a series of braided streams, the bridge crossing the largest of the channels. Once across the bridge, follow the boardwalks which here are provided to negotiate the smaller channels and reach the official **campsite, Nissonjokk**, a few minutes after crossing the bridge.

Nissonjokk campsite – in addition to an area for tents, this campsite has dry latrines and an open-sided shelter fitted with seating and a wood burner. (Latrines on the trail are enclosed in a small wooden hut and come furnished with a seat.) Campfire pits and rubbish disposal are also provided.

Continue close to the Abiskojåkka and after 2km, take a second bridge across another tributary, the Ballinjohka; be sure to turn left off the bridge and then



immediately right to keep on course. ► Once across the Ballinjohka, the birch trees become sparser and smaller giving the overall impression of a more expansive landscape. In places there are multiple boardwalks, a single line for walkers and twin lines to accommodate the all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) which are popular and heavily utilised by the Sámi when travelling to and from their summer settlements. Pass a [latrine](#) just before reaching the northeastern extreme of **Ábeskojávri Lake**. A little further on besides the lakeshore itself, lies the small Sámi village of **Gabna**, a fascinating mix of traditional *kåtor* and modern wooden builds. From the village continue easily along the eastern shore of the lake, which is overlooked by the dark steep face of Giron (1551m) to the east. At the lake's southwestern end, follow signs for Abiskojaure and 'Unna Allakas 24' and cross the metal suspension bridge over the wide **Kamajåkka River** to reach the lakeside site of **Abiskojaure STF Fjällstuga (Abiskojaurestugorna)**.

It is possible to reach this point directly from Abisko Östra railway station although it would involve fording the Nissonjohka River en route.

Crossing the Kamajåkka River



ABISKOJAURE STF FJÄLLSTUGA (490M)



Wheelchair access at the fjällstuga

Abiskojaure is one of the STF's oldest *fjällstugor* and although plans existed as early as 1903, it wasn't until 1907 that the STF was able to establish a presence on the site following the gift of a cabin by a local power company; a second cabin was added by the STF in 1911. The *fjällstuga* has beds for 61 spread across a loose circle of cabins. Campers and day visitors benefit from a dedicated *tältservicestuga* equipped with tables and chairs, gas cookers and utensils. The tent pitches are among the nearby trees behind the woodshed although care should be taken not to pitch too close to the nearby helipad! The entire site is furnished with raised boardwalks and ramps to allow wheelchair access, the first *fjällstuga* to be so equipped and a gift from the STF to the Swedish king, Carl XVI Gustaf. The shop is well-stocked and accepts bank cards as well as cash. The *fjällstuga* has a *bastu* and although not posted, a weather forecast is available on request from the *stugvärdar*. Details are posted for the optional motorised crossing that will be encountered on Stage 2.

STAGE 2

Abiskojaure to Alesjaure

Start	Abiskojaure STF Fjällstuga 490m
Finish	Alesjaure STF Fjällstuga 780m
Distance	20.3km
Ascent	345m
Descent	55m
Grade	Moderate
Time	6hr 50min
Terrain	Thinning birch forest then open fell. Good trail throughout, although rocky in places
Shelter	Open-sided shelter at the wooden boat jetty
Camping	Wild – once out of the Abisko National Park wild camping is permitted anywhere. Room for many tents 50m prior to the bridge across the Sielajohka River. Many other small spots once south of Gárddenvággi although care will be required to find a wholly dry site. Good sites immediately south of and across the bridge from Alesjaure STF Fjällstuga. Paid – Alesjaure STF Fjällstuga Shop at Alesjaure STF Fjällstuga
Resupply	

The second day trades the immediacy of the trail start for the remoteness of the mountains and some will find it a long and tiring walk following the easy introduction of the initial stage. Although relatively drawn out and moderately steep to start, the ascent through Gárddenvággi is gradual and rewards the walker with expansive views across a lake-strewn valley to the imposing wall of the Kåtotjåkka Massif beyond. Those that choose to make use of the seasonal motorised service across Alisjávri will cut the final (although easiest) 5km off their day's walk.

Retrace the trail out from Abiskojaure, back across the **Kamajåkka** and then follow the path southwards as it climbs gently uphill through thinning birch forest. ▶ Two kilometres from Abiskojaure a notice board marks the boundary and your departure from the Abisko National Park, from here onwards, wild camping is permitted anywhere.

Ahead, the view is dominated by the conical Gárddenvári (1154m) which guards entry to Gárddenvággi.