Jostedalen – a brief historical overview

Informasjonsmøte for reiselivstilsette
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Pre-modern Jostedalen (<1900)

• Isolated
• Marginal agricultural area
• Small farms
• Poverty
• A small local community – few and poor tax payers
• The pastor in the Jostedal: lowest income of all church districts in Norway
The first settlement

- The Viking Age
- Growing population
- Archeological research
- One Viking axe (Kjervik)
The medieval society

• We know almost nothing
  • Jostedalen mentioned in three written sources (ca 1320)
• A church and a pastor
• Farms probably on the same places as today
• Some of the mountain pastures (*stølane*) on a higher attitude than today
The great disaster (14th century)

• 1349: The Black Death to Norway
• 2/3 of the population died
• The famous legend *Jostedalsrypa* (Snow Hen)
• Bjørkehaugen
The second settlement

• After 1500: growing population in Norway
• Ca 1596: the first written source (a tax record)
• A church, a pastor, 25 farmers
• Settlers from Luster and Nordfjord
• Place names from Nordfjord: Grov, Bergset, Høgenibba (in Krundalen)
The Little Ice Age

- Forced major problems in marginal grain areas
- During several years the grain did not get ripe (barley, bygg)
- Expanding glaciers
Advancing glaciers

• 1740s: The farm Nigard destroyed
• Pasture areas destroyed (Nigardsbreen, Krundalen)
• 1742–43: emergency aid to Jostedalen (200 barrels of grain)
Farming and farmers

How did they survive?

• Grain cultivation (>1800 potatoe)
• Cattles and sheep
• Hunting
• Trade
Emigration

- The 1885 census: 885 people in Jostedalen
- 1851–1930: >800 people emigrated from Jostedalen to North America
- Visitors from USA/Canada every summer
- The dream of a better life
Getting there

• Before the 1870s: only paths
• A trip to Gaupne/Luster/Marifjøra: 2–3 days
• Traffic across the glacier
• The cattle trade
• The first glacier guides (1826)
Tourists discover Jostedalen

• ...and Jostedalen discovers tourism
• 19th century: some adventurers (artists, scientists)
• 1880s: mass tourism reaches the Fjords (cruise tourism)
• 1916: bus transport Sogndal–Jostedalen
• 1920: Jostedals-bredens Turisthotel
Mass tourism in Jostedalen

• Post WWII: privat car tourism
• 1951: Solvang kafe og pensjonat (Jostedal hotell 2002)
• 1954: Nigardsbreen gjesteheim
• 1958: Brevegen
• 1972: the first boat on Brevatnet
• 1987: Jostedalen breførarlag
• 1993: Breheimsenteret
• 2003: IceTroll
Jostedalen after WWII

• Decreasing population – Årdal
• Still dominated by farming
• 1958: electric power (late!)
• 1963: Jostedal municipality merged with Luster and Hafslo – Gaupne
• 1970-/80s: two powerplants (Leirdøla, Jostedal)
• Jostedalen integrated in the modern welfare state
• Biggest employer: the municipality
• Better roads – possible to work in Gaupne
Literature

About the history of Jostedalen in English:

• The exhibition at Breheimsenteret