

Shieling life in Gutulia

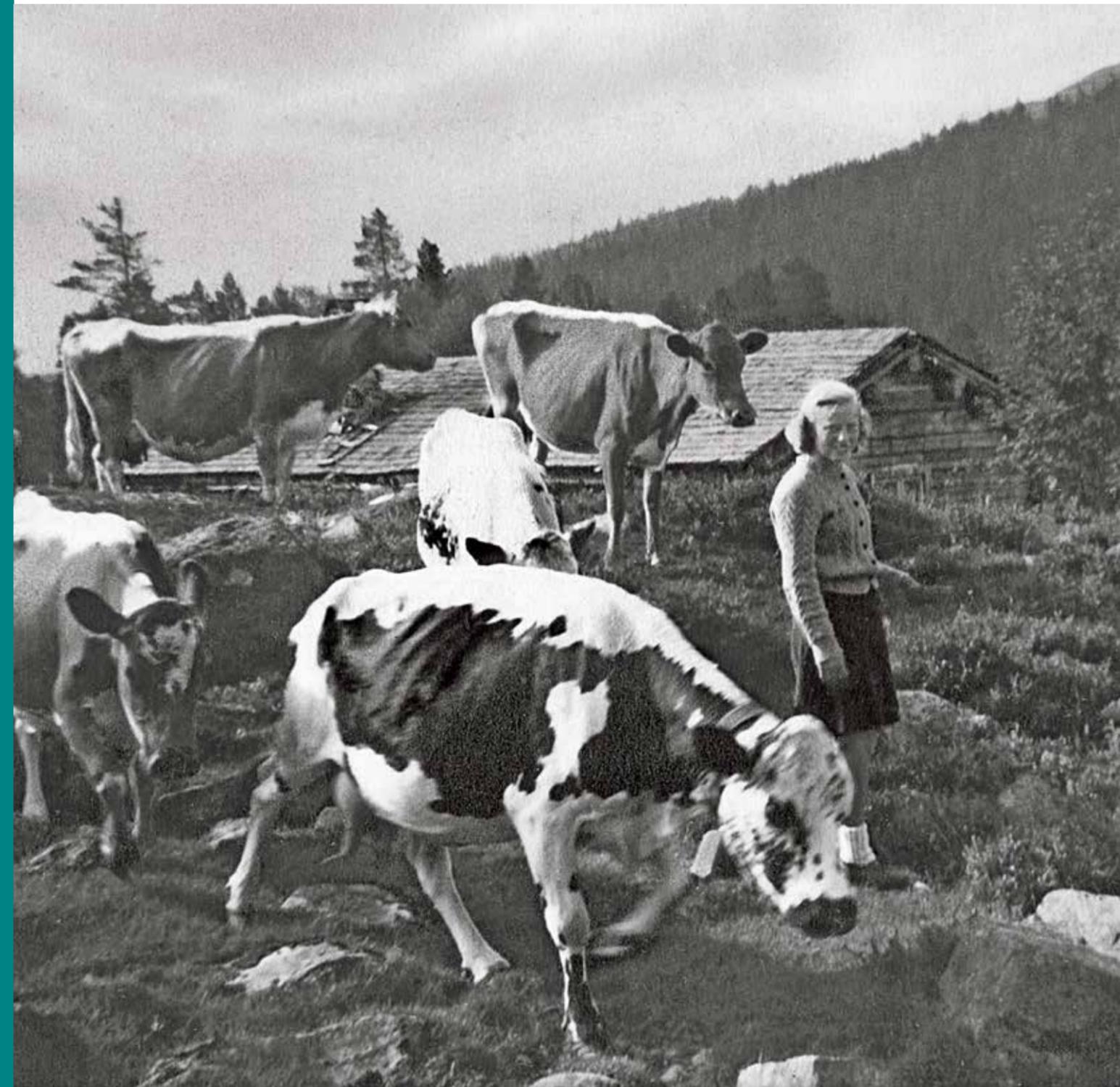
Just imagine life on the shielings ...

The smell of curd cheese, the taste of freshly churned butter and the sound of cowbells. In Norway, transhumance – moving livestock between summer and winter pastures – probably began with the first agriculturalists at the end of the Stone Age.

Norwegian laws from the 11th century include regulations about shielings and one of the oldest mentions of a shieling is found in Snorri's saga about Olaf the Holy, written ca. 1230. Transhumance continued in almost the same way for centuries, before the major changes occurred after 1900.

Cover photo

Mikkel and Sofie Sorken being visited by curious hikers, sometime in the 1930s. The number of hikers increased at this time, as there was a growing interest in hiking and nature among the Norwegian population. People wanted to get outside and experience the “real” and “wild” Norway. Perhaps the hikers had just stopped for a chat, or perhaps they paid for an authentic stay at a shieling?



Helga Sorken herding animals that always stay close to the shieling.

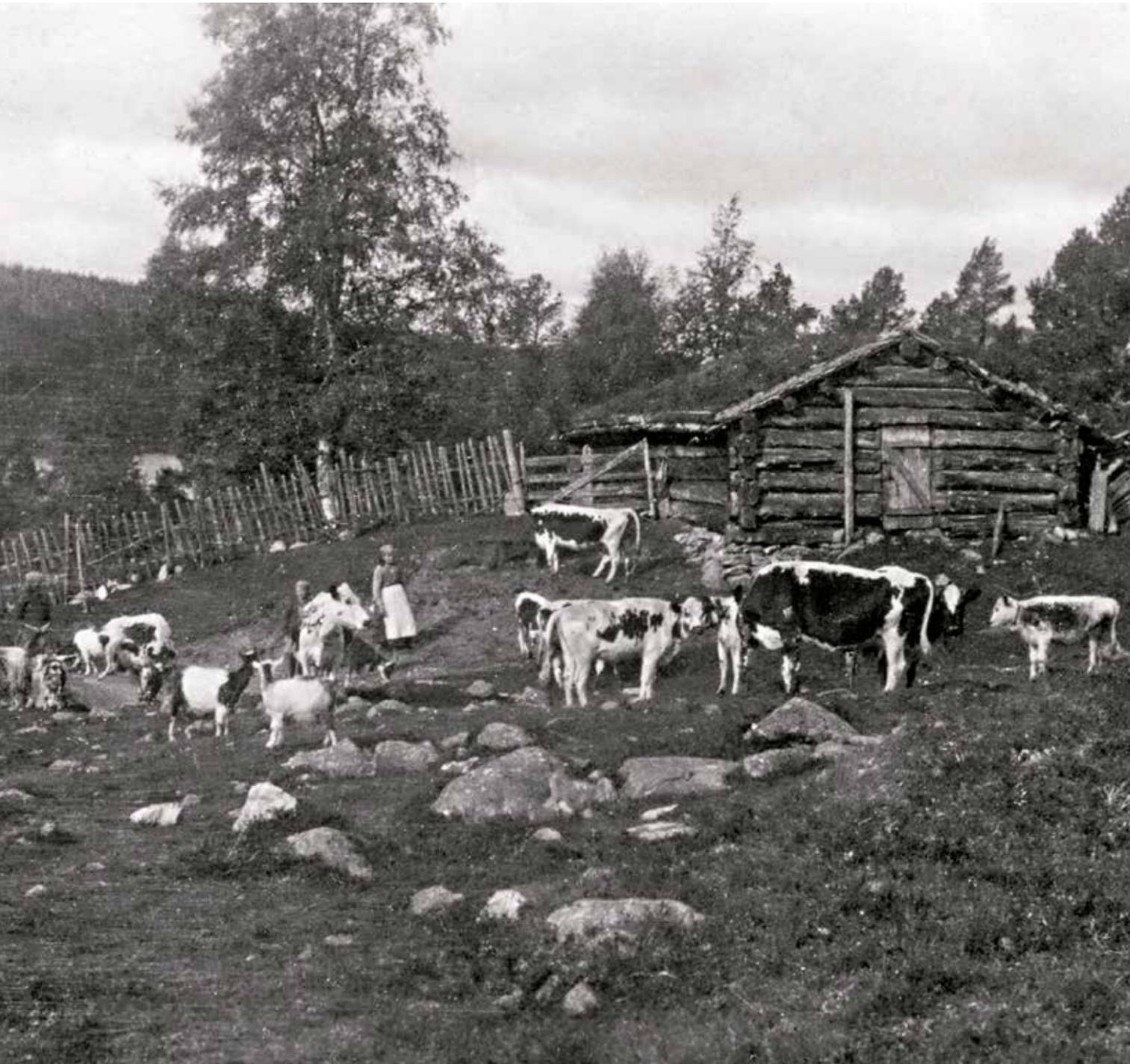


Shielings in Gutulia

Around 1750, three farmers from Sorken and Lillebo in Engerdal each cleared forest and built a shieling here – Nedpåvollen, Oppåvollen and Lillebovollen. The shielings were used for 200 years – up until 1949.

Every summer, in mid-June, people moved to the shielings with their cows, sheep and goats, and stayed until almost the end of September, depending on how much food there was for the animals. Mothers and small children stayed here the whole summer. Fathers and older children stayed home at the farm to make hay. This took around a month, from mid-July. Once the hay was cut, people from the farm also moved here.

Bertea Sorken was a milkmaid at the shieling in around 1939 – here, she's being visited by Bergitte Myhr (left), Marta Sorken (second right) and Helga Sorken (right).



The children herded the animals, which all had to be back in the barn at night in case a wolverine, wolf or bear came to visit.

Milk – the base for everything

The first thing people did when they arrived in Gutulia was to cut fresh marsh grass to fill their mattresses. Cleaning would definitely have been necessary, as there were probably a few mouse droppings to remove.

After this, the days were spent looking after the animals, milking and processing the milk. This was chilled in the cold water from the stream and tasted even better when the animals grazed on plants in the forest. The milk was made into white cheese, brown cheese, sour milk cheese, sweet cheese, spreadable cheese, butter, sour cream, cream, fermented milk, buttermilk and porridge. As you can see, milk was incredibly important.



Helmer and Torben Sorken and a giant pine tree. The old-growth forest in Gutulia has unusually big trees, and the pines generally live for 280-300 years. The oldest pine we know of is more than 400 years old.



Hågen Sorken chopping wood.

Nature's larder

There was no lack of food at the shieling, so it was rarely necessary to buy provisions down in the village. The lake was full of fish all year round and berry-picking was important in late summer.

Steaming hot

Everything was made in the steaming hot kitchen building, which was also used for baking. It was important to keep it at the right temperature throughout the day. Potato flatbread, flatbread and sourdough bread were baked during the week – and waffles at the weekend.

Marta Sorken and Helge Bentzen display the day's catch of river trout. The water was full of fish throughout the summer and people from the shieling fished with lines, bait and floats. The picture is from the early 1960s.



Girl power

Women on the shielings were far from other people, so they had to deal with every kind of challenge on their own. The women were also busy carding and spinning the wool from their sheep, and knitting clothes for their families.

One year, the kitchen building at Lillebovollen caught fire. First the women ran to fetch water, but as there wasn't enough to put out the fire, they also used milk and finally put the fire out, all on their own. One wall of the shieling building still has clear traces of the fire, but it was saved.

At least two children were born here, probably without the help of a midwife or doctor.

Kirsti was one of the very last people to use the shielings in Gutulia – aged 83! The final summer of activities at Lillebosætra was 1948. The families continued farming, but the shielings were far from any road and it was impossible to get the milk to the milk lorry. Kirsti brought up ten children and lived for almost one hundred years.





The journey from the farms to the shielings took about a day, so it was good to have the help of a horse. The journey started in the morning, right after the day's first tasks on the farm. They were at the shieling in the evening, before the cows needed milking again. This is Mikkel Sorken posing with his horse, probably in the 1920s.

Hospitality

Now and then, the cream and buttermilk were enjoyed by others too. The Sami people also migrated through the area, herding their reindeer. They needed calorie-rich, good food for their long journeys. The Sami paid in cash, which was popular with people at the shieling.

Weekend fun

The men and the oldest boys were busy at home on the farm with the haymaking, but at the weekends they were free to come up to the shieling. They transported food and goods to and from shieling, and probably received good food and attention from the women. There must have been extra excitement when the neighbouring boys came to visit the older girls. Many people did not have to travel far to find a sweetheart.



A new age

Transhumance in Gutulia came to an end in 1949. Travelling here was difficult, and farmers wanted to have shielings with vehicle access. Almost 200 years of transhumance was at an end. There was a lot of storm damage in the forest that same year, with many fallen trees. The Norwegian state wanted to use this timber, so started to build an access road into Gutulia. But it was too late – the shielings had already been abandoned.



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