

# The Royal Memorial Site of King Chulalongkorn



and a brief account of the  
Royal journey through Norrland

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The following texts are a compilation of material from the website *bispgarden.nu* as well as various books and publications. The sources include, among others, “*Looking Back... King Chulalongkorn’s Journey in Sweden*” by Sommai Pongrugthai and Karin Lundström, “*King Chulalongkorn’s Pavilion – Siam’s Great King and His Journey to Sweden*” by Tage Levin, “*King Chulalongkorn’s Journey through Norrland 1897*” by Sören Nilsson and Ingvar Nilsson, as well as a number of newspaper articles.

## Tourist Journeys to Bispgården – the First Tourist Destination of Jämtland

Long before the mountain world became the very image of tourism in Jämtland, there was another gateway to the region - a place where the river carried travelers through forests and valleys toward an as yet undiscovered inland. In the late 19th century, the first organized tourist journeys along the Indalsälven began to take shape, and with them something new was born: a Jämtland visitor industry with Bispgården as its hub.

It was a time when travel still carried an air of ceremony and curiosity. Gentlemen in top hats and elastic-sided boots journeyed upstream at a slow and steady pace, while ladies with sun parasols sought tranquility and scenic beauty in rural idylls. As early as the 1870s, commercial travel began to establish itself, and from 1892 it was possible to travel the entire distance between Sundsvall and Fors. There, at the meeting point of railway, steamship, and horse-drawn carriage, one of the country's first cohesive tourist destinations emerged.

With the founding of Ångfartygs AB Sundsvall–Indalsälven in 1888, traffic along the river was organized into an impressive logistical chain. The vessels *Turisten*, *Indalen*, and *Liden* carried travelers' step by step through the landscape - a journey that could take up to fifteen hours against the current. But there was no hurry, the journey itself was part of the experience.

When travelers reached Edset in Utanede and continued toward Bispgården, they were met by something that would soon become widely renowned: a landscape of dramatic beauty and stories. At Döda fallet, the forces of nature were written in stone, and the stories of Vild Hussen lived on as both fact and myth. Here, visitors found not only views—but stories.

The arrival of the railway in Bispgården in 1885 further strengthened the place's importance. Soon, combined train and steamship journeys were offered, and a steady stream of visitors sought their way to this sparsely populated region. Hotels and boarding houses sprang up, first around the station and later along the riverbank. It was a time of flourishing - a short but intense era when Bispgården stood at the center of something greater than itself.

The reputation reached far beyond Sweden's borders. In the summer of 1893, Princess Stephanie of Belgium arrived, and the following year King Oscar II traveled the same route.

## We follow King Chulalongkorn's journey along the popular route between Härnösand and Sundsvall

### Härnösand

After eighteen hours of travel through the northern coastal landscape, the royal yacht *Maha Chakri* approached Härnösand. On July 16, at seven o'clock in the evening, pilot Strömberg came aboard. Long before the vessel reached the harbor, the town and the entire Ångermanälven had come to life. Preparations were extensive, and the atmosphere was filled with anticipation. The steamers that normally maintained daily traffic had canceled their routes; instead, pleasure excursions were announced to meet the distant guest. Every boat that could float was launched.

Among them was the steamer *Pelle*, commanded by Captain Wallin, which took on as many passengers as possible. The river filled with vessels of all sizes, from small rowing boats to proud steamers. *Pelle* passed them all and positioned itself just outside the pilot station, in the best possible place to witness the arrival.

Kings and emperors had previously traveled up the Ångermanälven—Oscar II and Wilhelm II had appeared here only a few years earlier—but this was something different. This was a procession from a distant kingdom, from Siam, and it carried with it a sense of the unknown.

The reporter “Valle” from *Vesternorrlands Allehanda* described the moment with the dramatic flair of the time:

“After a short period of feverish waiting, two masts appear above a projecting, forest-clad headland... and at the gaff a white elephant in the middle. It is the flag of Siam.”

When *Maha Chakri* glided past *Pelle*, cheers erupted. Fourfold hurrahs rose toward the sky. Rockets were fired from the boats, and music spread across the water. The great steam yacht slowly entered the harbor and anchored, surrounded by a swarm of vessels circling her like a festive centerpiece.

On board was King Chulalongkorn, and according to Consul General Axel Johnson, he received this unusual tribute with visible emotion. Yet a certain disappointment marked the evening - the royal party never went ashore. For the many gathered, only a distant glimpse remained.

As evening fell over Ångermanland, a quiet shimmer settled over the scene. Valle ended his report in words that captured the national romantic spirit of the time:

“The sun has set, the summer night lies mysteriously dim over water and land. Out there in the harbor lies *Maha Chakri* gleaming in electric light... Sleep well, King of Siam! May your first dream beneath the bright northern sky be as fair and beautiful as this.”

## Sollefteå

In Sollefteå, preparations were both feverish and dignified. Apothecary Askberg had devoted all his efforts to creating a reception worthy of the moment. The entire town was decorated; flags waved from houses and farms, and at the steamship quay a particularly grand decoration had been erected, as if the river itself were to bear witness to the celebration that awaited.

At Hotel Appelberg everything was ready. Two rooms had been prepared for King Chulalongkorn: a salon in yellow silk and a bedroom where the magnificent “royal bed,” once acquired for Oscar II, stood as the natural centerpiece. From the salon, a small balcony led out toward Storgatan, and on the upper glass veranda a café room had been arranged. Flowers and flags were everywhere - a quiet but clear tribute.

The streets between the hotel and the quay had been watered to bind the dust. People arrived from near and far, many by train, and by two in the afternoon the crowd began to move down toward the river. Carriages stood lined up in long rows, horses stamping impatiently as if sensing the importance of the moment.

When the steamer *Strömkarlen* approached, the river had narrowed and the water grown more forceful. On board, the entire party stood observing the landscape, where rapids foamed between the high riverbanks. At that moment, the king is said to have exclaimed, with simple but heartfelt delight: “What a beautiful country.” A salute from Bruksmon answered him, echoing between the mountains as the vessel docked.

Crown bailiff Huss came aboard and escorted King Chulalongkorn and Prince Paribatra ashore. A cheer was raised, and the crowd responded with loud hurrahs that filled the air. The journey through the town became a procession through a sea of people; Storgatan was lined with spectators, and every step was accompanied by waving and applause.

At the hotel, host Appelberg received his guests, and soon the king and the princes appeared on the balcony. The cheering rose again, but behind the ceremonial facade there was also a more human reality. The planned excursion was officially canceled due to the king’s fatigue and the heat—but in secret, the king and the princes slipped away to a photographer, and the younger ones were even tempted into taking a swim.

Later in the day, the party continued to the salmon fishing grounds by the river. The king rested in the shade, while the princes tried their luck with fishing rods. The catch was poor, but the beauty of nature seemed to compensate for everything. Time and again the same words were repeated, sometimes even in Swedish: “What a beautiful country you inhabit.”

## Bispgården

Monday, July 19, 1897, dawned clear and calm over Sollefteå. At the railway station, the royal special train stood ready for departure—the locomotive steamed heavily in front of the royal carriage, followed by a saloon car and a bogie carriage, a discreet yet clear indication of the journey’s importance.

Breakfast was taken at Hotel Appelberg, but outside large crowds had already gathered. People wanted one last glimpse of the distant guests who, in just a few days, had become the subject of conversation in every home. When the moment came, King Chulalongkorn left the hotel by carriage, while the princes and the entourage took the shorter route on foot through the town. The crowd followed, and at the platform the air filled with anticipation. Flowers were presented, a cheer was led by Crown Bailiff Huss, and the applause rose as the king returned the greeting, calm and dignified.

Then the train set in motion and disappeared beyond the first bend—and with it, the visit to Sollefteå came to an end.

During the journey, the landscape gradually changed. The open views along the river, with sawmills and industry, gave way to something else—denser forests, rising mountains, and a nature that carried the promise of proximity to the highlands. The king’s private secretary, Mr. Seng, noted carefully:

“It is forested and mountainous... the river with rapids and waterfalls... it resembles northern Siam.”

Soon the train approached Bispgården and the valley of the Indalsälven—a region wilder and more untouched than those previously passed. There were few settlements here, and little trace of industry. Nature spoke with a different voice—quieter, yet deeper.

At Edset in Utanede, preparations had continued far into the night. Captain Nordberg and his son had supervised the work. The gangway down to the steamboat landing was decorated with flags, and the old triumphal arch—erected for Oscar II a few years earlier—had been adorned with spruce branches and birch leaves. Above the arch shone a symbol: a white elephant on a red field—the emblem of Siam—and beneath it, the ground was covered in green moss, decorated with a white “S.”

When the train arrived at Bispgården station, the welcoming committee stood at attention. King Chulalongkorn stepped down with a youthful liveliness noted by contemporaries. A cheer was raised, and the crowd responded in unison. The party then walked between rows of flags toward the tourist hotel.

There, a group of children dressed in white stood waiting with flowers in their hands. The king smiled, accepted the tribute—and lifted up the child he believed to be a little girl. It turned out to be three-year-old Theodor Näsström, a moment remembered long after the train had moved on.

The stop was brief. A simple but carefully prepared lunch was served, and a reporter from *Sundsvalls Tidning* observed the royal party with curiosity, their clothing, their manners, their quiet presence in this northern setting.

A short walk to a viewpoint overlooking the river was made before it was time to continue the journey.

Now the real adventure began.

## Indalsälven

The journey continued by carriage from the station down toward Edset. The road was narrow and dusty, lined with dense forest and scattered farms. Mr. Seng described how the landscape opened at the river, where a waterfall roared forth, reminding him of the rivers of his homeland. Passing through a decorated triumphal arch, the party reached the quay, where large crowds had already gathered.

Among them stood a girl, Anna, eleven years old, who held out a bouquet of water lilies. She curtsied as gracefully as she could, and the king accepted the gift with kind words she did not understand—but never forgot.

On the quay lay the steamer *Liden*, adorned with green garlands. It had been built to meet the forces of the river, a vessel capable of navigating rapids. As the party boarded, a new cheer rang out: “Long live the King of Siam!” And from the shore, the people responded with waving and applause.

Thus began the next stage of the journey—downstream, into the wild landscape where the river itself became the road forward.

What followed would later be described as a journey both daring and magnificent. The steamer *Liden* lay stern-first in the direction of travel, and in order to proceed toward Sundsvall, she first had to turn in the strong current. Captain Holmberg allowed the vessel to drift slowly into the foaming water, bow facing the current. A tense silence fell over those on board. Everyone knew the decisive moment was approaching.

In midstream, the maneuver had to be executed.

Suddenly the steamer turned—swiftly, precisely, as if guided by an unseen hand. The bow swung toward the shore, the rudder took hold, and in a single powerful movement the turn was complete. A murmur ran through the party. The danger was past, and the journey could continue.

Then began the descent—fast, alive, full of motion. The water pressed forward between high, forested mountains, and *Liden* moved skillfully from side to side to avoid shoals and hidden rocks. It was a journey that demanded both courage and precision.

King Chulalongkorn followed everything with great interest and is said to have remarked with genuine admiration:

“I congratulate the people on possessing such a steamer that can pass these rapids.”

## Sundsvall

At the river’s mouth, an entire fleet had gathered, as if the water itself had summoned its vessels to escort the royal guest. Steamers from near and far lay ready to accompany *Turisten*—the “King’s boat”—into Sundsvall. Through the Alnö Sound, the procession grew; more and more boats joined, all filled to capacity with festively dressed people waving white cloths and cheering.

Contemporary newspapers described the arrival as a triumphal procession. The steamer glided across the bay with the Siamese silk flag flying at the foremast, followed by a whole armada of vessels. Along the shores, flags waved from sawmills and loading steamers, and from mast to mast signals fluttered in color and form. It was a spectacle of movement, color, and sound, a tribute as much to the guest as to the moment itself.

Although no one knew for certain whether the royal party would go ashore, several thousand people had gathered at the harbor. Some had climbed ship masts, other rooftops, all to gain a better view of the bay. Part of the quay had been draped in blue fabric, in anticipation that King Chulalongkorn might set foot there.

Then the salute rang out—nineteen shots rolling across the water. Expectations rose. But *Turisten* passed by and instead positioned itself near *Maha Chakri*. A rowing boat with twenty men was sent out, and with steady, powerful strokes, the king and princes were transferred back to the royal yacht. A steam launch carried the rest of the party, while music from both vessels blended Swedish and Siamese melodies across the bay.

For many, it remained only a fleeting glimpse—a memory to carry forward. During the following day, rowing boats continued to circle the yacht in hopes of a closer encounter. On

board, the crew could be seen resting; they played ball on deck and tossed small red berries down to the people in the boats below—a simple gesture that created joy and connection.

## Departure from Sweden

Thus dawned the final morning of the visit to Sweden. Sundsvall awoke early. The harbor was dressed for celebration, with flags raised, a band in place, and military formations lined up. Horse-drawn carriages waited, with the carriage of industrialist Enhörning at the front.

At half past eleven, the royal party went ashore to the sound of the Siamese national song. King Chulalongkorn took his place in the first carriage, followed by Prince Paribatra and the others. They wore raincoats—a quiet reminder that the sunny weather had turned. No speeches were given, but the atmosphere was unmistakable: a meeting of worlds, calm yet meaningful.

The procession went to Kubikenborg manor, where the Enhörning family received their guests. Salutes were fired, flowers presented, and the sawmill was shown—the place where the timber that had traveled down the rivers took its final form. The king saw with his own eyes how nature’s resources were refined into trade and craftsmanship.

Later, the party returned to the town. The purchase of souvenirs followed—items of Swedish handicraft, baskets, birch-bark work, and knives of Eskilstuna steel, small objects to carry home from the northern land.

Lunch was taken at Hotel Knaust, where crowds once again gathered outside. The king appeared on the balcony and returned the greetings—a final gesture before departure.

In the afternoon, he returned to *Maha Chakri*. Before boarding, he sent a telegram to King Oscar II, expressing his gratitude for the hospitality shown during his journey through northern Sweden. At a ceremony on board, decorations were awarded to those who had played significant roles during the journey—a sign of appreciation and friendship across national borders.

At 5:15 PM, the yacht weighed anchor and was guided out from the harbor. The weather had changed; winds rose and the sea grew rough. Many on board became seasick, but the king himself remained unaffected. Toward evening, the wind subsided, and in the stillness of the night, the journey continued southward.

Thus, *Maha Chakri* left the northern Swedish coast—leaving behind a journey that had brought together people, landscapes, and cultures in a meeting that would live on long after the waves had closed behind her.

## Legacy and the Road

When King Chulalongkorn chose this journey in 1897 as part of his visit to Sweden, the Indalsälven route was firmly established as something of international significance. Here, not only nature and technology met—but also cultures, ambitions, and visions of the future.

The very possibility of this journey had been shaped far beyond the forests of Jämtland, through the opening of the Suez Canal—a global artery that made Europe accessible to the world.

After the construction of the Hölleforsen power plant in the late 1940s, the landscape changed fundamentally. Yet, even in this new era, the Swedish National Power Board chose to look back.

They restored the old road—the one built between 1892 and 1894 from Holmsta down to the steamboat harbor at Edset. This was no ordinary road. It was a path through history. Here, King Chulalongkorn had traveled on July 19, 1897.

When the road was revived, it was given a name that would carry the memory forward:

### King Chulalongkorn's Road.

Even today, it winds through the landscape—quiet and self-evident yet filled with stories. Royal wheels once rolled here. Worlds met here. Travelers passed through who made this remote river valley a point on the international map.

### How It All Began

It did not begin with a building.  
Not even with a plan.  
It began with a question.

When Sommai Pongrugthai and his wife Siriporn Pongrugthai arrived in Sweden in 1973, they brought with them more than luggage. They carried the story of King Chulalongkorn, the king who modernized Siam and kept colonial powers at bay. A symbol of pride, independence, and belief in the future.

Two years later, in 1975, the question was asked that would change everything.

The young doctoral student Nati Nilnoppakun had heard a rumor: somewhere in Sweden there was said to be a road named after the Thai king. Could it really be true? He asked Sommai. The answer was no. No one knew.

But curiosity had been ignited—and it could not be extinguished.

The years passed. More people joined the search, including Annop Kunavongkrit and his friend Nitthi Rattana La-ong. They searched for archives, stories, memories. And eventually—as in a story long waiting to be rediscovered—they found it.

A small road between Utanede and Edset, along the banks of the Indalsälven.  
**King Chulalongkorn's Road.**

Here, the king himself had traveled in the summer of 1897. Here, he had boarded the steamer *Liden*, on his journey through the Swedish landscape he wished to understand—the forest, the industry, the future.

What began as a rumor had now become a place.

And the place began to draw people to it.

What had long been a whisper—a story passed from person to person—reached, in 1980, all the way to the Thai Embassy in Stockholm.

The ambassador did not settle rumors. He traveled north, followed the traces through maps and memories—and at last found the road. It was there. Real. Yet almost forgotten, as if history itself had come to rest in the forests around Utanede.

Five years later, in June 1985, the next step was taken.

Sommaï and Siriporn Pongrugthai met with First Secretary Sanit Chomchan at the embassy in Stockholm. The conversation proved decisive.

There was a will to bring history back to life.

Chomchan envisioned something simple—but powerful: a road sign, also written in Thai. A visible proof that King Chulalongkorn had truly traveled here. And more than that, he proposed that the sign should be erected in 1997, exactly one hundred years after the king's journey. Perhaps with a ceremony. Perhaps with something greater.

**The seed had been planted.**

But the true moment, the one that changed everything—did not come until the summer of 1992.

On their way to the North Cape, Sommaï and Siriporn made a detour. With them were two highly respected Buddhist monks. What was meant to be a brief stop became entirely different.

They stood there.

By the road they had been searching for, for nearly twenty years.

The forest was still. Almost reverent. And in that moment, the perspective changed.

It was no longer about putting up a sign. It was about creating something that could carry history for real.

**An idea was born.**

Not cautiously—but with force. Something would be built here.

Something that honored the king.  
Something that connected Thailand and Sweden.

At Holmsta farm, Sommai met the landowner Anders Lundström. The conversation that followed has, in retrospect, taken on almost mythical qualities—but the result was real: a piece of land was made available.

### A place had become a project.

Soon, things began to happen quickly. Dance groups from Thailand arrived and stood in wonder before the sign bearing the king's name in the Jämtland forest. Associations were formed. Contacts were established. A 50-year lease secured the land.

And in 1995, by the small pond at Holmsta, people from two worlds gathered.

Monks in saffron robes blessed the ground. Swedish and Thai flags waved side by side. Spades were set into the earth. Music was played, speeches were held—and something that had once only been an idea took its first physical form.

It was the beginning of something greater than a construction project.

It was the beginning of a story of persistence, friendship, and cultural encounters.

Of how a forgotten path in the forest could become a bridge between continents.

And perhaps above all—how a single question can change everything:

### **Does it really exist?**

Here is your **faithful, full English translation**, preserving the narrative tone and structure:

## Ahead of the Construction of Sala Song Thai

The year was 1997.

What had long been a vision was now facing its trial.

The date had already been set - July 19. A day that would make history. But reality does not bend to ambition. Time was too short, resources uncertain. It soon became clear to the Chulalongkorn Memorial Association that the pavilion itself would not be completed in time.

But to cancel?

That was never an option.

Instead, a new idea was born - both pragmatic and bold. A museum would be built. A place that could carry the story, even if the symbol itself was not yet in place.

On May 30, the groundworks began. A road was drawn down toward the site. On June 18, the foundation slab was poured - a concrete step forward. But then everything came to a halt. Financial uncertainties settled like a heavy weight over the project. Days turned into weeks.

Until something shifted.

During a few intense summer weeks - weeks 28 and 29 - the building rose. A modified prefabricated house from Myresjöhus took shape. Simple. Stripped down. Without the decorations that would one day give the place its Thai character. But it stood there. And that was enough.

At the same time, opposition grew.

Parish priest Bengt Gullberg and politician Karl Åkergren openly questioned the project. A campaign to stop the pavilion construction gained momentum. Opinions diverged. Discussions grew increasingly intense.

But at Holmsta, the work continued.

The ground was leveled by local contractors. A stage was built—not from polished structures, but from what was available: a truck from Bröderna Eriksson and a trailer from Bispgården's towing service. Around the pond, a temporary world emerged.

Market stalls.

Tents.

A small fairground.

The smell of food. The sound of voices. Anticipation in the air.

Hotel Indalsleden set up its beer tent. Parking areas were arranged. Everything pointed toward a day no one quite knew what it would become—but everyone understood it mattered.

And then it came.

The morning of July 19 began quietly. At 08:50, the master of ceremonies welcomed the audience. But soon, the atmosphere changed.

At 09:09, the Thai ceremony began.

An offering table stood prepared, filled with dishes and gifts. A symbolic stone was placed—the first marker of what would one day become the pavilion. Around it, some twenty trees were planted by specially invited guests, their names attached to the trunks as promises to the future.

And in the midst of it all—cameras.

International media were present. Thai television crews. Even CNN. What was happening in a small village in Jämtland had suddenly become a global story.

From the stage, two languages were spoken. Swedish and Thai. Music and dance filled the space—two cultures meeting, not as strangers, but as something new together.

At 14:05, the ceremony moved down toward the museum. A marching dance led the way. The ribbon was cut by a representative from Vattenfall, and the doors were opened by Sommai Pongrugthai himself.

Inside the building, there were no finished exhibitions in the traditional sense—but something perhaps more important: images, articles, memories. A story taking shape before everyone's eyes.

And people came.

Not in the hundreds.  
In the thousands.

Around 3,000 visitors moved through the area that day. Despite the pavilion not yet existing. Despite the fact that everything was, in truth, only just beginning.

When the official program ended around 6 PM, the evening took over. Music, song, laughter. The summer night kept the place alive long after the sun had begun to set.

The next day, a quiet calm settled over the area. Market stalls were dismantled, the fair disappeared, and the sounds of celebration were replaced by the rhythm of everyday life. By afternoon, farmers were back in their fields cutting hay—as if nothing had happened.

But beneath the surface, everything had changed.

The phones began to ring.

First a few calls, then more.

Questions poured in from across the country—and soon from other parts of the world:

What is happening up there?  
Where exactly is it?  
Is it possible to visit?

Curiosity spread faster than anyone could have imagined. What had just been a local event had suddenly become something larger, something that drew people in.

And the response did not take long.

On August 1, a staffed tourist information center opened at Holmsta.

What had once begun with a simple question...

had now become a place that others began to seek out.

## Construction Begins

It was as if the ground itself had decided.

Once work truly began in the summer of 1997, everything started to fall into places, sometimes quite literally. In Bispgården, the reconstruction of National Road 86 had long been planned. Now, just when the need was greatest, the road was dug up. Massive amounts of soil and stone were removed.

And ended up exactly where they were needed most.

In Utanede.

What for others was surplus material became the foundation of something entirely new. Truck after truck unloaded its cargo, and slowly the landscape began to change. The ground was raised—three meters above its original level. This was no longer just a place to visit. It was a place built to last.

Markers were set out—not only for the building itself, but for bridges, stairs, and pathways. Everything already existed—on paper, in thought, in will.

Now it would be anchored in the ground.

On August 11, the steel pipes arrived. Long, heavy. They would be driven deep—up to 26 meters—to support something that was still only imagined above the surface. A few days later, the contractor raised their flags over the site. A sign: construction is underway.

But reality made itself known.

When piling began on August 26, progress was slow. The machine lacked power. The blows were too weak. The ground resisted.

Things grew quieter. Slower.

Until a decision was made.

On September 9, a new machine arrived. Heavier. Stronger. And suddenly the rhythm changed. Blow after blow drove the steel pipes deep into the earth. By week 37, the work was complete.

The foundation was there.

In week 38, form began to take shape. Wood, steel, lines. On September 23, the slab was poured. Concrete filled the frames—and with it came the weight of reality. Here, it would stand.

And it did.

During the autumn, the walls rose. Prefabricated columns were lifted into place, one by one. The building began to appear in the landscape. No longer an idea—but something visible, tangible.

On Saturday, October 25, people gathered again. A wreath-laying ceremony. A centennial remembrance of King Chulalongkorn's journey. At the same time, a market was held in Forshallen. Life and construction side by side.

And the work continued.

In week 49, the upper roof was installed. Winter crept closer, but construction did not stop. On the contrary, it took a step into the future. A camera was installed. For the first time, people could follow the construction via the Internet.

A small place in Jämtland—seen by the world.

When 1998 began, attention turned to details. The steel structure for the spire—fifteen-meter-long pipes—was raised on February 5. A clear sign of what was taking shape.

Inside, walls were painted. Floors laid. Outside, surfaces were plastered. In April, groundworks resumed—the pond was drained, new shapes created.

It was no longer just a building. It was an entire environment.

Bridge foundations were cast. Entrance walls rose. The façade took shape. The characteristic details—fixtures, forms, lines—began to give the place its identity.

In May, something special happened.

The two bridges began to be assembled.

For the first time, their curved forms stretched across the water. It was not only function—it was symbolism. Paths meeting. Cultures connecting.

Roofs were laid. Tiles put in place. Sand filled within the walls.

And then—life.

In early June, soil arrived. Trees were planted. Shrubs set into the ground. The Place gained color, structure, future.

But nature made its own intervention.

On June 7, the island collapsed—an obvious setback. A moment of doubt. But just two days later, it was restored. Stronger. Just like the project itself.

Grass was rolled out. Railings completed. The entrance painted. Gates installed.

And at the same time—people.

More and more found their way here. Traffic increased so much that the road through Utanede had to be rebuilt ahead of schedule. Hundreds of cars every day. On Midsummer Day, around 800 cars arrived.

This was no longer a secluded construction site—it was already a living place.

Hot dog vendors appeared. Visitors stopped by. Children ran across areas that had just recently been a building site.

And in the midst of it all, the work continued, step by step, detail by detail.

What had once begun as a question...

had now become something no one could ignore.

## Inauguration 1 – Summer 1998

Now it will be decided.

After months of hard work, doubt, progress, and setbacks, everything stood ready—or as ready as it could be. The summer of 1998 had arrived, and with it a sense that something historic was close.

On June 30, they arrived.

The craftsmen from Thailand.

Carrying knowledge, tradition, and details that could not be improvised.

During a few intense days, they transformed the interior of the building. Wood, color, ornament, everything found its place. What had previously been a structure now became something alive. Something with a soul.

And then, on July 3.

A delivery.

Heavy. Nearly 800 kilos.

A statue.

When it was lifted into place, he finally stood there—King Chulalongkorn—life-sized, cast in bronze, gazing out over the landscape he himself had once traveled through. It was no longer just a tribute. It was a presence.

Two days later, the craftsmen returned home. Their work was complete. But preparations continued without pause. Flowers were planted. Final adjustments made. What had been built over a year would now meet the world.

And the world came.

On July 18, Utanede filled with people. Locals, tourists, journalists, TV crews. Even ambulances stood ready—not out of concern, but because no one quite knew how big this would become.

The queues grew quickly.

Hundreds of people waited patiently to get in. Seeing the statue. To understand what had been created here, in the middle of the forest.

And in the midst of all this careful planning, all the preparations, something almost comical occurred.

The sign.

**The Thai text had been mounted upside down.**

The discovery came only hours before the inauguration. A flurry of activity broke out. Signs were unscrewed, turned, adjusted. By the time the guests arrived, everything was in order—as if nothing had happened.

But behind the scenes, the tension had been high.

At Holmsta farm, cars stood lined up. Not just any cars. Limousines, arranged through persistent negotiation, waited for their passengers. Here, at the very place where the idea had first been born in the summer of 1992, the invited guests now arrived.

The circle was complete.

Around them, the market was in full swing. Music, voices, laughter. The scent of food mixed with the summer air. Swedish and Thai elements blended into something no longer possible to separate.

It was a celebration.

But also, something more.

For many who were there, it was not just an inauguration. It was witnessing the result of something that almost no one had believed possible at the beginning.

An idea made real.

A road turned into a symbol.

A place transformed into a meeting point between two worlds.

And in the midst of it all—still, unwavering—stood the statue.

As if it had always been there.

## Inauguration 2 – Summer 1999

What had been inaugurated the year before... was really only the beginning.

As 1999 began, there was a clear feeling in the air: now everything would be completed. Visions were drawn up, ideas made concrete. Architect Ulf Alexandersson presented plans for what the whole would become—not just a building, but a cohesive area, a place with direction and identity.

In April, preparations began in earnest. Five temporary barracks were set up at the site—simple, but functional. Here, the craftsmen would live, eat, and work during the remaining construction period.

On April 18, they arrived.

Around ten Thai experts, masters of their craft. They had traveled far but knew exactly what remained to be done. The following day, a truck rolled in—heavily loaded with materials from Thailand. Teak crates, filled with several tons of decorative elements, were carefully unloaded and opened.

What lay inside would change everything.

But no major project is without obstacles.

When the decorations for the gable peaks were unpacked, a problem arose. They were significantly heavier than expected. The structure held—but the margins were too small. A crisis meeting was called. The solution was quick and practical: reinforcements were added, timber supports that could carry the weight.

The work continued. And slowly, something began to shine.

On May 10, the spire stood completed—in all its splendor. It rose above the treetops, caught the light, and spread a golden glow over Utanede. It was as if the place itself had changed—from construction site to landmark.

At the same time, the surroundings took shape. The parking area was completed. Restaurant Terrassen began to emerge. Paths, spaces, movement. Everything was prepared for what was to come.

And people had already begun to arrive.

From May 15 and well into autumn, guided tours were held every day. Visitors paid an entrance fee—but received something far greater in return: a story, a place, an experience unlike anything else in Sweden.

Behind all this, there was also recognition.

The Swedish Tourist Association had named Ragunda Municipality Tourism Municipality of the Year 1998.

This was no longer a local matter.

It was national.

And then came the day.

July 18, 1999.

The second inauguration.

But this time—the real one.

Preparations were meticulous. Tents were raised. Decorations put in place. Guests arrived from near and far. The anticipation was palpable.

And when the ceremony began... it was as if the entire area came alive.

Thai dancers swept between the buildings. In their hands they carried money trees—symbols of gifts, community, and future. Their movements were rhythmic, colorful, alive.

Some even danced backwards—out of pure joy.

The audience was immense. People pressed together, following every moment, absorbing every detail. This was not just an inauguration—it was a meeting of cultures in real time.

And then came the moment.

At a formal ceremony, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister, Pancha Kesornthong, symbolically handed over the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site to the County Administrative Board of Jämtland and Ragunda Municipality.

What had been built through the commitment of two countries now became a shared gift.

A bridge.

Fixed in wood, gold, and tradition.

Around it, life continued. The market buzzed with activity. The restaurant at Holmsta stayed open late into the night. Visitors lingered, reluctant to leave.

And the numbers spoke for themselves.

150,000 visitors during the year.

500 buses.

Tens of thousands of guided tours.

The King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site in Utanede was named Sweden's Tourist Attraction of the Year.

What had once begun as a question...

had now become a success.

But perhaps most importantly—it was not the end.

As the year drew to a close, the story continued to move across the world. In October, a cultural group from Ragunda performed in Bangkok. In December, Thailand officially presented the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site as a gift.

The bond was sealed.

Not only between places. But between people. And that bond would prove to endure—far into the future.

## 2000–2021 – Between Dream and Reality

When the grand inauguration faded in the summer of 1999, the site stood there—complete, alive, and filled with expectations.

But what happens when a vision becomes reality?

That is when the real test begins.

## New Dreams Take Shape

In the year 2000, attention turned forward once again. Plans were presented—larger, bolder. Orchid houses, a museum, a craft center, a cultural center. An entire world was to grow around the pavilion.

Not everything became reality.

But something did.

A small orchid house was built, filled with plants donated from Thailand—a reminder of its origins. That same year, Ragunda Municipality took over ownership of the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site—the responsibility had become local.

The following year, the area began to be shaped more deliberately. Artists Gudrun Pierre and Gørgen Norman created grass sculptures. Pathways were laid out. Flower beds were planted. An entrance was constructed.

The place was no longer just something to see.

It became something to walk through.

## Gifts from Thailand

The engagement from Thailand continued—and sometimes took unexpected forms.

In 2002, an offer arrived that almost sounded like a fairy tale: King Bhumibol of Thailand would gift two female elephants to King Carl XVI Gustaf.

No elephants came to Utanede—but the symbolism was clear. The bond was strong.

The elephants were instead placed at Kolmården when they arrived the following year.

That same year, something else was built: a new structure in genuine teak. Another gift from Thailand, created for stillness and reflection.

The teak pavilion was inaugurated by Ambassador Poksak Nilubol and Governor Maggie Mikaelsson. Around it, Thai craftsmanship was displayed—wood, textiles, color, tradition.

A spirit house was also erected—a place for unseen guardians.

It was no longer just a monument.

It was a cultural landscape.

## Life, Movement, and Great Summers

The years that followed were filled with life.

Festivals.

Markets.

Concerts.

One name, in particular, returned like a rhythm through the years: Diggiloo. The summer stage in Utanede drew audiences from across the region. Music met cultural heritage.

In 2007, 110 years since King Chulalongkorn's journey through the area was celebrated. An entire cultural week spread across several locations. Guests were driven around in specially extended cars, sponsored and loaned detail that showed how commitment still carried the project forward.

And far away, in Bangkok, people from Ragunda performed.

The story moved in both directions.

## New Ideas – and New Challenges

In the late 2000s, new plans emerged. A spa facility. Further expansion. International investments.

But reality proved more complex.

Operations changed hands several times. Companies took over—and left. The municipality stepped in again. Discussions increased. The future became more uncertain.

At the same time, the site continued to live.

New paintings were added. The king's statue was remade, more lifelike. Experiences were created—such as the journey “In the Footsteps of the King,” where visitors could follow the same route as in 1897.

But beneath the surface, something else grew.

A need for maintenance.  
An economy that did not add up.

## Between Pride and Concern

During the 2010s, the contrast became clearer.

On one hand: ceremonies, ambassador visits, anniversaries.  
On the other: worn buildings, reduced resources.

Each year, the Memorial Day on July 19 returned. Representatives from Thailand traveled here. Speeches were given. The bond was reaffirmed—again and again.

Ambassadors such as Soonthorn Chaiyindeepum and Kanchana Patarachoke took part in the ceremonies. Discussions were held about renovation, development, the future.

But the questions grew more pressing.

How should the site be preserved?  
Who would pay?  
What was the next step?

In 2019, it was openly stated: development had declined. Costs increased. Maintenance was neglected.

And yet—people kept coming.

## A Place That Refuses to Disappear

Between 2019 and 2021, much changed. The entrance was closed. Free admission was introduced. Visiting became easier—but also more vulnerable. No revenue.

At the same time, cooperation took a new form.

The Thai Embassy contributed financially. A digital exhibition was created visitors could now access the story via QR codes, in both Swedish and Thai.

The story moved into the future.

## And What Remains?

In the early years after the turn of the millennium, a particular expectation rested over Ragunda. The King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site was not just a memory—it was a promise. The municipality saw opportunities, plans were drawn, visions painted. Something would grow here. Something greater. A center for culture, tourism, and international encounters—deep in the forests of Jämtland.

It was a time of forward vision.

But over the years, the tone changed—almost imperceptibly. The visions remained, but everyday reality took more space. Events were organized, visitors welcomed, collaborations maintained. The site was still filled with music, ceremonies, and movement—but the work increasingly focused on managing what already existed, rather than building something new.

And gradually, reality made itself more clearly felt.

Maintenance demanded attention. Finances tightened. Decisions became more cautious. Questions that had once been about development became questions of responsibility.

How long could this continue?  
What was reasonable?  
What was possible?

And yet, something never truly changed.

Despite doubt, despite costs, despite discussions that at times leaned toward closure—the municipality never let go. The King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site remained something special. Not just a building, but a story. A relationship. A heritage that could not easily be measured in budget lines.

So, the years between 2000 and 2021 were not a straight line, but rather a pendulum.

Between optimism and caution.  
Between dream and reality.

And perhaps it is precisely there, in that tension, that the true significance of the place lies.

Because despite everything - it still stands there.

In the forest.  
By the river.

As a memory of a king.

But even more - as proof of what people can create together, even when the path there is anything but straight.

## King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site 2022–2023 – An Uncut Diamond Awakens

After years of discussion, stalled development, and growing maintenance needs, something began to move again.

Not through grand promises.

But through action.

The King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site in Utanede had long been described as an uncut diamond destination with enormous potential, but lacking the final care needed to truly shine.

And it was precisely there that the change began.

### Local Engagement Takes the Lead

Ahead of the 2022 season, the Fors Business Association took a decisive step. Together with Ragunda Municipality, they were given responsibility for the tourism operations at the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Site.

This was not merely an operational solution.  
It was a statement.

With support from local associations—the Fors Heritage Association and the Fors Community Association—a preliminary study on the future was initiated. The question was no longer whether the site had value.

The question was how great it could be.

### An Area Reopens

As work continued during 2023, the changes began to show.

The entrance was renovated.  
The technology in the large greenhouse was brought back to life.  
And—perhaps most importantly—the cultural building was reopened.

Buildings that had been closed for several years once again welcomed visitors. The whole began to re-emerge. What had once been a cohesive experience became so again.

Much of the work was driven by local forces—together with experts such as horticulturists Stefan Lidberg and Larz Danielsson. Plantings filled the area with color and life. The greenhouse gained new energy.

It was not a rapid transformation.  
But it was a clear direction.

## A Living Celebration – in the Heart of the Forest

At the same time, traditions continued.

On July 16, 2022, the Thai Pavilion Fun Run was आयोजित—a running event that attracted participants to the site and connected history with the present. Kanchana Patarachoke, Thailand’s ambassador to Sweden, was present alongside representatives of the municipality. Speeches were held. The memory lived on.

And as every year, the important dates returned:

July 19 – the anniversary of King Chulalongkorn’s visit.

October 23 – the anniversary of his death.

In 2023, Thailand’s new ambassador, Arunrung Phothong Humphreys, attended both occasions. Together with diplomats, representatives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and the defense attaché, ceremonies, wreath-laying, and meetings were held.

But behind the formalities, there was also something more concrete.

A question about the future.

After the ceremony in July 2023, the Thai representatives expressed a clear request:

a comprehensive overview of the pavilion’s renovation needs—and a plan for how it could be further developed.

This was not merely courtesy.  
It was a signal.

## Between Responsibility and Opportunity

The years 2022 and 2023 thus became something of a turning point.

Not through large-scale construction projects.  
But through regaining control of what already existed.

To open up.  
To care for.  
To demonstrate that the site still has strength.

And perhaps most importantly—that both local forces and international stakeholders once again began pulling in the same direction.

## A Sudden Setback

As 2023 drew to a close, it became clear that the story was not over. What had been experienced as a success—and a glimpse of a possible future—during a strong year ended as a cold shower.

The decision came abruptly.

After a season driven by engagement, effort, and growing optimism, it suddenly became clear: Ragunda Municipality had chosen a different path.

Free admission.  
Closed buildings.  
No staffing.

For the Fors Business Association, it was difficult to understand.

The year before, they had taken responsibility for operations and demonstrated what the site could become. Visitors had streamed in. Revenue had been generated. The greenhouse had been restored, the entrance revitalized. What had long been fading had begun to breathe again.

Now, everything risked coming to a halt once more.

Chairman Anders Ljung described the decision as incomprehensible—particularly since the association felt their proposal for continued operations had never truly been met, never taken hold in meaningful dialogue. For them, it was not primarily about subsidies, but about having the right conditions to continue building on what already worked.

In their view, the relationship was simple:

**Without entrance revenue - no resources.**

**Without resources - no maintenance.**

**Without maintenance - a slow decline.**

It was precisely that development they believed they had broken.

Their plan extended beyond a single season. Over time, they argued, the operation could become self-sustaining—even reduce municipal costs. But that required continuity. And above all—trust.

Instead, buildings now stood closed again. Doors that had just been opened were shut. What had, over a summer, been filled with people, voices, and movement risked becoming still once more.

## Still—It Will Remain

And yet, It will remain. Not as protest - but as conviction.

That the place still had more to give.

And a clearer understanding of what the site truly is:

Not just a memory.

Not just a monument.

But still - **an uncut diamond, waiting to shine in full.**