

Friluftsliv¹

By Fridtjof Nansen²

As I look back over the many years that have passed, and compare the generation of my own youth, with the one that is now growing up, I cannot deny that there have been great changes in favour of the youth of today, not least in the fields of the Sporting pastime and friluftsliv. There is now a new outlook on the Sporting pastime and its value, a new tempo in its growth amongst the youth of Norway. It is chiefly the sport of skiing which has been the pioneer here, and it is here that the difference from time of my youth is particularly striking. I can recall how I would set off on ski-trips into Nordmarka and find my own tracks from a fortnight earlier. Today, I believe it would be difficult to distinguish them after no more than a few hours.

It is possible that not all aspects of this development are good, however. There may well be a little too much emphasis on sport instead of the Sporting pastime; too many “record” and too many specialisations. A skier is all too often a man who can jump so-and-so many metres. This may well develop the body, at least part of it, but the spirit should also be included. It may well be that what is far too often overlooked, is that the Sporting pastime is not a goal in itself, but a means, and that the goal should first and foremost be as it was before; a sound spirit in a sound body.

It is also another aspect of today’s sporting life that is in my view too prominent; gregariousness.

It would seem that one can no longer take part in sporting pastimes without being part of a crowd. Clubs, associations and competitions, frequent social gatherings at clubhouses and cabins are an apparent necessity.

But an important aspect of Sporting pastimes should surely be friluftsliv: to be able to get away from the crowd, away from the perpetual race, the confusing clamour in which we conduct our lives to far too great extent – to get out into nature, into the open. That is to me the greatest aspect of friluftsliv. But that cannot be achieved by going out in crowds and following the trodden paths, by bunching together in cabins, running on schedule from one sanatorium to the next, or by sailing from one bathing resort to the next dancing away through evenings and nights with delightful young girls.

However appealing it might be, this is not friluftsliv – it is merely a continuation of the life that the youth have lived during the whole winter, and it will not give those many new impressions.

This urban life is after all unnatural, and was certainly not our destiny from nature’s mould.

¹ This is an extract from professor Fridtjof Nansen’s speech “for young people” at The University of Oslo as part of a program meeting arranged by The Norwegian Tourist Association (DNT) in June 1921. The translation is by Paul Hough, member of FOR-UT and qualified mentor of friluftsliv.

² For more information about Fridtjof Nansen: <http://www.mnc.net/norway/Nansen.htm>