

NORWAY

World Heritage sites

Norway has five sites inscribed on the World Heritage List: Bryggen (1979), Urnes Stave Church (1979), Alta Rock Drawings (1985), Røros (1980) and the Vega Archipelago (2004). Risk-assessments are currently being made, but none of the World Heritage sites are considered Heritage at Risk. Periodic reporting conducted for the sites of Bryggen (2000) and Røros (2003) emphasise the importance of safeguarding the authenticity, integrity and significance of the sites.

The construction of the wharf of Bryggen is threatened by new use and by damage to the built structures caused by passing traffic. This results in vibrations which can result in a shift of deposits and archaeological layers. Measures to mitigate this impact have been taken by moving vehicles out towards the front of the quay area. A management plan prescribes actions for permitted adaptive reuse of the wharf structure.

Røros World Heritage Town is a living historic environment, and the integrity of its historic urban structure is threatened by modern urban development and general town expansion or encroachment. Measures are being taken with building surveys, urban design and planning, and extensive fire protection programs.

For the Alta Rock Art site the need for an appropriate tourism management strategy should be addressed urgently.

For the Urnes Stave Church, the main management challenges are the protection of its authentic wooden structure as well as the issue of fire protection.

Churches

Legislation protects all churches in Norway built before 1850. Many of these suffer from decades of a lack of maintenance. The cost of repair for these churches is calculated to exceed 1 billion Euros. Today, many parishes are experiencing a radical decline in their active congregations. The parish is the owner of the churches, but the county is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings. The National Council of Bishops has recently agreed that it will be acceptable to demolish churches. The lack of funds at the county level, a decreased will for regular upkeep and the approval to

demolish churches, come together to constitute a serious threat to churches in Norway. In these circumstances, the Norwegian Church Council (the highest institution within the Norwegian Church) recently concluded that it is not possible to maintain all churches. The Council would like guidelines on how to sell and demolish churches that are no longer in active use.

Fire constitutes the most serious threat to Norwegian churches, sadly assisted by isolated fringe Satanic movements. Considerable efforts are being made to provide churches with fire protection systems. Many of them, however, still lack even an adequate fire warning system.

Cultural landscapes

The cultural landscape in Norway is undergoing rapid change. Two main reasons are the decrease in the number of farms, especially hill or 'mountain' farms, and the diminishing extent of cattle grazing in the higher altitude and rough grazing areas. Today, forests are reaching higher altitudes, low timber prices making harvesting unprofitable. The stone fences, grave mounds, ruins, and meadows [denoting former landuse] are overgrown and increasingly invisible. Farm closures are not only a threat to cultural heritage but also to biological diversity, as 50% of all threatened plants in Norway are to be found on grazing land.

The number of working farms decreased from 155,000 to 71,000 between 1969 and 2000. Thirteen per cent of all houses on agricultural properties were not in use at the beginning of 2000, and about fifty per cent of all residential buildings on agricultural properties were located on farms where the land on which they are situated is not cultivated. The total number of farm buildings where people still live is about 900,000, with more than 210,000 abandoned (certainly not all of them should be protected). The landscape at higher altitudes was traditionally maintained by cattle, but the number of farms in these areas has fallen from 26,437 in 1939 to 2,742 in 1999.

A major threat to cultural landscapes also comes from the expansion of local communities that surround larger towns, for example the communities neighbouring Oslo that are under great pressure to develop housing and industrial areas on agricultural land.