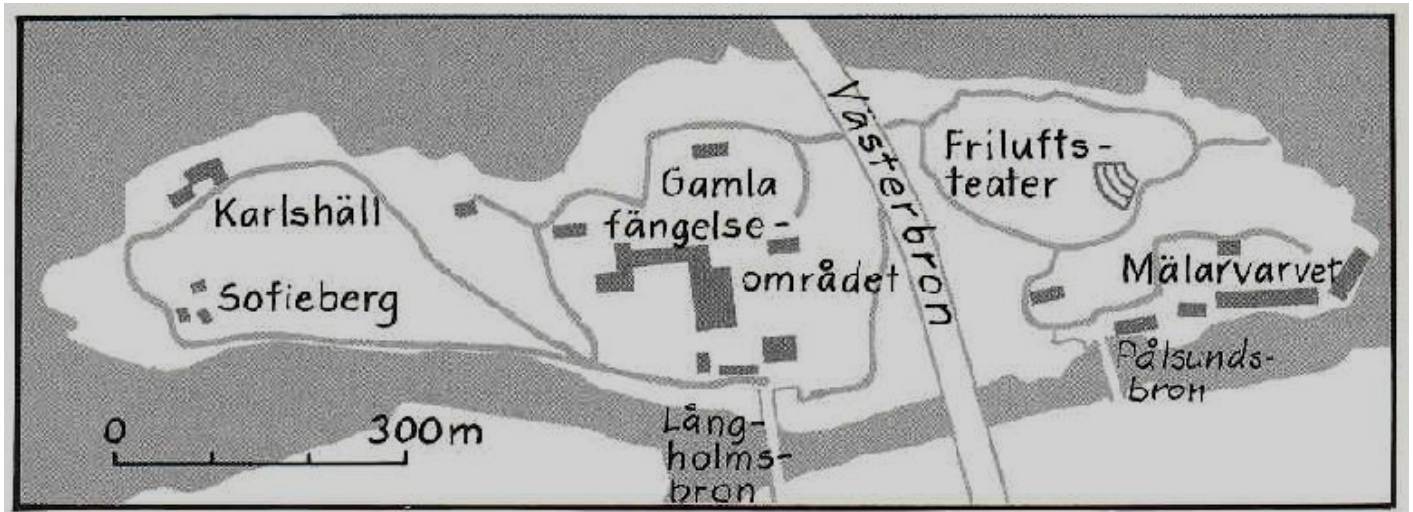


Stockholm Walkabout: Långholmen “The Green Island”.

Schwish!!...the sound from the guillotine, when the executor Dahlman released the blade, ending the life of Johan Alfred Ander on the 23rd November 1910 (8.06am), a convicted murderer and the last person to officially be executed in Sweden, and the only one to be executed by a guillotine at Långholmen Crown Prison in Stockholm.



Långholmen prison, ca 1900



Långholmen is one of Stockholm’s largest island, also called “The Green Island”, and perhaps the one about which most myths and stories are told, mainly because of the old prison. You can discover for yourself, during my walking tour around the island, that it is not only an exciting place, but a piece of unspoiled countryside within the city. A visit to the island can be a full-day excursion, with a walking tour, picnic and a refreshing swim in Lake Mälaren during the summertime..

I enter the island via Långholmsbron (The Long Islet Bridge) which is a bridge in central Stockholm connecting the major island Södermalm to the minor island Långholmen, it forms an extension to the street Bergsundsgatan.

The bridge was formerly called Spinnhusbron (The Spinning House Bridge) in reference to the precursor to the Långholmen prison, and, popularly, Suckarnas bro (The Bridge of Sighs), also in reference to the prison. Its present name stems from 1885. This section of Västerbron, the bridge passing over Långholmen, used to be called Långholmsbron.



Långholmsbron

Most likely, an old wooden bridge was found here by the mid 17th century, as this was the location for a custom house dealing with the ships delivering goods to the city from Lake Mälaren. Nevertheless, it is present on a map dated 1733, and was replaced by a new wooden, four-span truss bridge in 1845, 33 m long, and 6 m wide. In 1931, the present three-span steel girder bridge was inaugurated; 56 m in length and 8 m wide with a roadway of 5,6 m.

This island was a prison island between 1724 and 1975, housing one of Sweden's bigger prisons, with more than 500 cells, since 1874, called Långholmens Centralfängelse (Långholmen Crown Prison).



Notable prisoner

Some notable prisoners include:

- Barbro Alving, Journalist, pacifist who refused to participate in civil defense, and was jailed for one month
- Johan Alfred Ander, convicted murderer, executed with guillotine in 1910.
- Jan Guillou, convicted of espionage for Russia, and sentenced to 10 month.
- Hannes Skjöld, socialist, author and poet, sentenced for anti-militaristic propaganda
- Zeth Höglund, a leading Swedish communist politician, anti-militarist, author, journalist and mayor (*finansborgarråd*) of Stockholm (1940–1950).
- Ture Nerman, a Swedish socialist. As a journalist and author.
- Colonel Stig Wennerström, the most well known prisoner was convicted for espionage and treason in 1964. During the 1950s, he leaked the Swedish air defense plans and the entire Saab *Draken* fighter jet project to the Soviet Union.

To say the least this is a colorful and well known group of people.

While crossing the bridge I observe a young girl standing on a dock trying to take a photo of a Blue Heron (Grå Häger) sitting close by on a pole in the water. In this picture we have all the ingredients of a Stockholm midsummer dream retained.



Straight ahead of me I see the impressive main prison building, and when I come closer I see a plaque on the building wall telling us where the guillotine was placed during the execution of Johan Alfred Ander on the 23rd November 1910.



Prison building.
Today a hotel and conference,
restaurant center



Plaque on the wall indicating
where the guillotine was placed



Model of the Guillotine

The infamous Kronohäktet (Crown Prison) at Långholmen later became one of Sweden's most famous hostels. A couple of years ago it was voted, by The Times newspaper, to be one of the 10 best hostels in Europe, making it a worthwhile place to visit and maybe stay at.

The old prison cells were converted to very comfortable hotel rooms, with single or double room layout constructed from combining several old cells. There are several excellent restaurants on the premises and we had a wonderful dinner at the very exclusive Wårdshuset restaurant (main restaurant).

The breakfast we had at the small bar in the same building as the hotel was excellent.



The "new Långholmen Hotel"



Cell/Room complex



Our cell/room number



Old cell layout

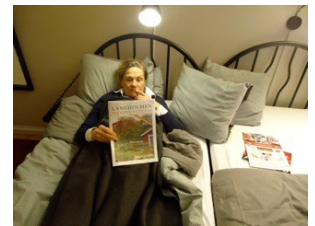


Modern room layout from 2 1/2 old cells

After consuming a very delightful dinner at the Wårdshus restaurant we went to bed in our cozy little "cell" and was ready to go to sleep when we heard some whispering voices from the corridor in the cell block. We went and peeked outside the door and in the dim light we saw two men sitting at a table talking with each other. We went closer and we saw it was the executor Alfred Dahlman and the prisoner Anders Alder sitting at the table over a bottle of beer talking about how well the guillotine worked. Excited, and on very shaky legs we went back to our cell and locked the door very well, and finally we went into a deep sleep.

Obviously this is a bit of fiction, but the main point is that this is a top-notch hotel with an absolutely vivid history, which must be discovered and experienced on the premises.

We also had a private-prison guide, Anneli Björkeen, during our visit who could tell all the stories about Långholmen and the prison. During scheduled guided tours the guides are dressed in prison guard uniforms.



Following a very nice breakfast I walk to the side of the prison/hostel building and I see Knapersta estate, which consist of two buildings, Big and Small Knapersta, built during the 1700's by Immanuel Nobel, the father of the Nobel Price Winner Alfred Nobel. Classical landscaping and a very beautiful garden is in the front of the buildings and I see many small song birds among the bushes. The story has it that Alfred already then was playing with dynamite and one of his friends was hurt in an accident, so the dynamite business was moved away from the island to a safer place for that kind of experiments.



Big and Small Knapersta

I continue my walk along a small road to Sofieberg, which is the far western part of the island. There are two remaining buildings built according to the late 1800's architecture style. The "Red House" and the "Green House", which is the most interesting house of the two. It is built in real Swedish "snickarglädje" (gingerbread style). In the past the Sofieberg property included the entire western cape of Långholmen, and in the middle of 1970's, when the prison era ended, the area was made accessible to the public.



The Red House

The Green House

On the opposite side of the cape we find the Karlshäll Gård which is a very impressive and beautiful property. The property is today mainly used as a conference center. The property also has beautiful gardens, although somewhat overgrown, that is worth a visit to admire the blossoms. One interesting period of the Karlshälls Gård was during the heated "brännvinskriget" (aquavit war), during 1870-1880, between the owner L.O Smith (brännvinskungen or the King of Aquavit) and Alcohol Providing Company of Stockholm. Smith had set up sales of alcohol on the adjacent island Reymerholme, which was listed as property in Brännkyrka assembly outside the Providing Company's jurisdiction, making it possible for him to work around the local ordinance to sell alcohol.



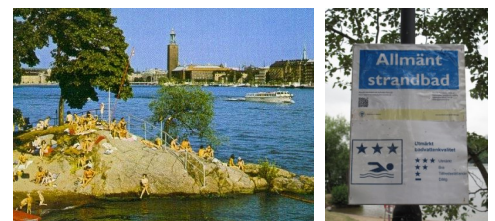
Karlshäll Gård

Isn't this the same "war" we see even today between private providers and monopolistic authorities? But, after some extended time period peace was established between the warring parties, including several incarcerations of the involved parties in Riddarholmen and Långholmens prisons.



Brännvinskungen
Lars O. Smith

I am continuing my walk to the northern side of the island and I see two places for public bathing, one including a fabulous view of downtown Stockholm. I asked an older lady swimming in the lake "how is the water, is it cold"? She answered that the water is nice, so jump in, and I responded that I don't have any swimwear available and that I don't want to embarrass anybody.



An official site marking indicated very good water quality, perfect for bathing, so it was tempting.

Just as I'm walking around the eastern cape I see SS Carl Philip passing by, and I had been told that if you call the captain he will stop and pick you up. I never tried and don't know if its true or not, but it was tempting to try, as it is only 5-10 minutes from the Town Hall in Stockholm.



SS Carl Philip

After a short while I'm now reaching the eastern side of the island and see Mälavarvet (Mälaren Shipyard Warf) in front of me, which is the last shipyard Warf on Långholmen situated at the southeast point. The Warf has a history all the way back to the 1680's, but in 2007 the owner of the Warf was put into bankruptcy and an industrial period in Stockholm saw its end.



The Warf

As I'm closing in on the western bankseat of Påsundsbron I see a building called "Fördärvet". In the middle of the 1800's this was a Pub from which the building got its name. This was a place where you could "fördärva" (mar) your economy and your health if not careful.



Fördärvet

The name is speaking for itself and is in the same category as Pungpinan (when one torment the purse to pay for the alcohol) and Sista Styvern (was a pub where the seamen had their last snaps prior to going back to sea, or where prisoners had their last snaps prior to their hanging).

With all these impressive images in my mind I'm crossing Påsundsbron and slowly walk back to the bus station to get back to my mother's apartment for dinner.

More information for the interested:

- Wikipedia: Långholmen
- Wikipedia: Södermalm i tid och rum. Stockholm (in Swedish only)
- Stockholm's Stadsbibliotek: Stockholmskällan