Follow Arn’s footsteps on the Internet: www.skaramus.se
At the same time you can get tips about travel, eating and sleeping.
At first all I needed was a ‘Swedish’ knight whose eyes could serve me in telling about Christianity’s holy war against Islam during the Crusades. I discovered rather quickly that were he to be found, he would have to come from Västra Götaland and have been born around 1150.

Seeking him turned into a long journey – from Skara to Varnhem, Gudhem to the Aranäs fort, and the Forshem Church to the battlefields at Lena and Gestilren. Soon it was as if the search and the fantasy became bewitched, as if Arn Magnusson, as I had named him after his imagined childhood home at Aranäs, actually had existed. Or at least someone like him.

For see, parts of Aranäs castle reflect foreign influences and the Forshem Church is built by the same hands that shaped the castle. Moreover, the church is not dedicated to the Virgin Mary as almost all churches were at this time, but to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which in turn was guarded by the Knights Templar. And in a stone relief carved by the Forshem Master we see a knight depicted as the donor of the edifice and above him the cross of the same temple order! And it is inescapable that the person or persons who led the Folkunga and Erikian families in the victories at Lena and Gestilren against the powerful Danes knew how battles were fought in the Holy Land – longbows and mounted knights appear here for the first time in our history.

Whoever built the Forshem Church, this returned Temple Knight is the same man who shaped the miraculous victories at Lena and Gestilren. They are why we speak Swedish today and not Danish. Those battlefields midwifed the birth of Sweden.

Arn Magnusson really existed. And he is the father of our country!

Jan Guillou

“The Road to Jerusalem”, the first book in Jan Guillou’s trilogy, starts in Skara. It is here that squire Arn Magnusson launches his adventure into the realm of monks and temple knights.

The first of these popular history novels is set entirely in medieval Västergötland, specifically in the land between lakes Vänern and Vättern. It is a time of change and renewal, a time when Sweden is formed, when Christianity advances in heathen Scandia bringing with it the basis for a new society, a new civilisation and a new knowledge. The next two books, “The Temple Knight” and “The Kingdom at Road’s End” continue the Arn Magnusson saga. Arn is a fictional personage, but the places and events in the novel are based on a historical reality whose farmers and kings, priests and noblemen can no longer speak for themselves. But the traces of that time remain in the landscape, as well as in the archives and collections of the museums. Scripts and artefacts, churches and monastery ruins remain to aid our imagination’s journey in time.

Come with us on a journey in Arn’s footsteps. We have chosen 13 places with great historical significance to the formation of the Swedish kingdom, at the same time as they were the most important sites in Arn’s story.

Anja Praesto
Västergötland Museum

Arn Magnusson was born in the year of our Lord 1150.

Having spent his youngest years at Aranäs, his childhood home, Arn is taken to the Varnhem monastery at the base of the Billingen plateau. The monks bring him up to be a warrior for Christ and he becomes a temple knight in the Holy Land. Jan Guillou’s trilogy follows Arn through life. You too can walk in his footsteps by journeying through the Västra Götaland where he walked. Your road to Jerusalem begins in Skara.

In the sequel novel, Arn’s Legacy, the history continues. The central character here is the national regent Birger jarl, “Arn’s grandson”. And again the paths lead to Västra Götaland, Sweden.
Today’s cathedral is a mighty Gothic edifice built with sandstone from the mountains of Västergötland. One remnant of the eleventh century is the unique crypt that served as the last resting place for the first bishops. Fires and vandalism have necessitated several renovations of the church. The collection of seals belonging to medieval bishops and the lovely stained glass windows contribute to the church atmosphere.

However, the cathedral no longer stands on the city’s highest point. Some 900 years later, the city has ‘caught up’, its streets and squares now resting on an almost three metre thick layer of cultural artefacts and old trash. It allows us to learn much about how our medieval predecessors lived.

Today’s street grid is in much the same as then and street names like Tullportagatan and Gråbrödragatan (Tollgate and Grey Friar streets) reveal something of the city’s past.

The early history of Skara is described at the Västergötland Museum exhibition named "Medieval Skara". The focus is on Skara’s period of greatness when the city was a centre of power during the medieval formation of the Svea Kingdom. There is also an exhibition about Arn.

The early history of Skara was a centre for both church and state. It was a ‘metropolis’ by the standards of the day boasting some 700 inhabitants in a city surrounded by a high fence made up of posts, wooden poles and earthen walls. The low slung residences pushed up against workshops, cowstalls and food storage sheds. People lived on top of each other, awash in the stench of dung and waste. The difference between city and country was small – everyone had animals and raised vegetables on small plots.

Commerce and trades flourished alongside this cultivation. Skara was both a meeting and a market place. On market days a motley mix of merchants, farmers and craftsmen peopled the square, along with monks, nuns, ecclesiastics, children, jesters and animals. Foreign songs and new instruments penetrated the murmur of the madding crowd providing proof of the international trade and contact with the continent via the port of Lodöse on the Götaälv river.

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The cathedral stood on the city’s highest point. Its spires towering over the city marked the city centre and served as landmark for visitors.

It is the year of our Lord 1150. While praying in the cathedral Arn’s mother Lady Sigrid has a vision directing her to donate the Varnhem estate to the Cistercian Order.

Almost 900 years later during the advent season 1999, the cathedral will be consecrated following a comprehensive restoration designed to serve new generations and coming centuries.

It was at Tibertius, the day thought of as the first of summer, a time when the ice broke up in Västra Götaland. Never had so many people gathered in Skara before, but then no ordinary mass was to be celebrated that day. The new cathedral was finally ready to be consecrated.

The oldest furniture known in Sweden, the Suntakchair from the 12th century.
Forshem is proud to have a unique medieval church with its own place in Swedish history. The oldest part of the nave is from the 1100s. Its greatest claim to fame lies in its six stone reliefs. Christianity and the new society it created brought with the skill of building in a new material, namely stone. Stone churches were built around Kinnekulle and the area became a landscape of open quarries and workshops. Church builders from all over the Skara plain came to fetch sandstone and limestone for their edifices. Over time the churches were rebuilt, but the sculptures remain - stone is eternal.

In the 1760s the Forshem Church was given a cruciform design. The immediate church area is a valuable setting that includes the parsonage from 1790. Three of the Forshem reliefs show the Passion story and one is thought to contain a self portrait of the stone master himself. But who was this man with pick, chisel and mallet? We have no name for this skillful artist, so sought after in Västra Götaland and elsewhere that he was asked to be stone master for the Skara Cathedral. We call him either the Forshem Master or the Skara Master.

Forshem is proud to have a unique medieval church with its own place in Swedish history. The oldest part of the nave is from the 1100s. Its greatest claim to fame lies in its six stone reliefs.

The possible site of the royal demesne is today covered by the ruins of the Husaby episcopal castle, built in the late 1400s. It was here in the royal demesne that Arn was seduced by Algot Pålsson’s daughter Katarina. Later when he was practising Christmas songs in the Husaby Church, he met the other daughter Cecilia and lovely music was made in more than one way…

TOURIST INFORMATION
A multimedia exhibition called "The Well" was produced as part of the millennium of Sweden's Christianisation. Focusing on the baptism of Olof Skötkonung, the show started in Husaby and then toured Sweden, Germany and England. "The Well" is even available on CD-ROM.

For more info on “The Well – Die Quelle – Kälkan”, check www.husaby-well.com
Turistbyrån Pilgrimsängården, Husaby: +46-(0)511-34 32 60.
Turistbyrån Lidköping, +46-(0)510-77 05 00.
Homestead Ass. Cafe: +46-(0)511-34 30 30.

MORE READING
"Husaby church", leaflet. For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

Forshiems Gästgiveri (restaurant), +46-(0)501-420 55.
Turistbyrån Pilgrimsängården, Husaby: +46-(0)511-34 32 60.
Turistbyrån Mariestad: +46-(0)501-100 01.
more reading For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

Hey had imbibed Christmas ale in the great stone hall at Aranäs, well warmed by its log fires, and life had never seemed better. At the early Christmas service down at the Forshem Church a confident and proud Arn had shown what he had commissioned, even putting his own figure in stone above the church portal as the one giving the church keys to the Lord. And above him was the cross of the Knights Templar.

It is likely that another of the carvings is of the lord of the Aranäs castle, the one known as Arn Magnusson in the novel.

The Forshem Church is consecrated to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

TOURIST INFORMATION
The church is open daily, Apr–Sep, 08–20. There is a pilgrim’s shelter at the parsonage.
Forshem Gastroneri (restaurant), +46-(0)501-420 55.
Turistbyrån Pilgrimsängården, Husaby: +46-(0)511-34 32 60.
Turistbyrån Mariestad: +46-(0)501-100 01.
more reading For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.
One of the most discussed ancient monuments in Västra Götaland is the stone ship at Askeberga. Also called Ranes Stenar, the ship was built during the Iron Age (app. 400–500 AD). At 55 metres, it is the second largest in Sweden after Ales Stenar in Skåne.

The monument consists of 24 gigantic megaliths weighing between 25 and 30 tons each. They must have been transported some distance since there are no blocks that size nearby. The work of transporting and raising the blocks must have called for the efforts of a large group, meaning there must have been a well organised, stratified society. It may be that the stone ship served for the burial or the commemoration of some local chieftain.

Askeberga is where Arn introduces half-siblings and allies into his family.

**Tourist Information**

The stone ship lies on a secondary road W of the Tidan community.

Turistcentrum Skövde: +46-(0)500-44 66 88.

**More Reading**

For additional reading ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.

Visingsö Island has a great number of Iron Age burials. The Medieval enthusiast should not miss the Brahe and Kumlaby churches. The open horsedrawn vehicles called Remmalagen are a popular transport means on the island.

Real drama is mirrored in the Arn novel by letting the main character witness the assassination of King Karl Sverkersson, an event that actually took place in 1167.

**Tourist Information**

Gränna-Visingsö Tourist Bureau: +46-(0)390-401 93 or 410 10.

Jönköpings länsmuseum (county museum): +46-(0)36-30 18 00.

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The battle at Lena left deep tracks in Kungslena and in our history. It may be that the battles that raged here in the early 1200s were decisive to the formation of the Kingdom of Sweden.

Kungslena comprises a historically interesting setting with church, manor and castle ruins in what was once the largest village in Skaraborg county.

Tradition has it that the Kungslena Church was built by King Erik Läspe och Halte in the mid-1200s to the memory of the battle at Lena. This is where the Houses of Erik and Sverker fought on January 31, 1208, in a battle clearly won by the former. However, King Sverker returned two years later with his Danish army. This time, the royal House of Erik finished the long running fight with the Sverker family, for at Gestilren in 1210 AD, King Sverker fell in battle.

This battle may have been won by the new military techniques used, namely ironclad knights and bowmen. At this time a mounted knight carried a shield and wore a chain mail shirt and a helmet.

A large granite monument has been raised near the church to the memory of the Battle at Lena. A few kilometres to the south at the Varv crossroads, there is another stone, this one commemorating the Battle at Gestilren.

At the fork is an unusual wooden, richly painted road sign called Granne Påle or Splendid Post. The 1902 original stands on Turbinhusön island in Tidaholm.

The ruins of Lena Castle lie on the mountain slope above Kungslena. Built by Regent Birger jarl, the castle foundations are mostly hidden under the earth. Investigations suggest that the castle wasn’t a fortification, but rather an upper class brickbuilt residence from the late 1200s.

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Perhaps the loveliest of all cloister names had been given to one in the southern part of Västra Götaland, Gudhem was its name and this God’s Home was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The cloister was built on a ridge with a view over the distant blue Billingen mountain and, with a little effort, the double spire on the Skara cathedral. North of Gudhem lay the glittering lake Hornborga sjö where the cranes came each spring before the pike began to spawn. The cloister was surrounded by farms and fields and small oak copses. Truly an exceedingly peaceful and handsome countryside with no intimations of darkness and barbarity whatsoever.

Life at the Gudhem Cloister seems both harsh and peaceful. Living inside the cloister walls was strictly parcelled by song and prayer. It was cold and draughty – especially the harsh winters were hard to bear. But the cloister was a wellspring of knowledge and ideas where the nuns learned new languages and some crafts. The cloister was founded in the mid-1100s at the initiative of King Karl Sverkersson. The monastery was dedicated in 1140 to the Virgin Mary. The only refuge they may seek is to enter a monastery. The monks teach Arn language, philosophy and theology, but also practical skills such as forging, cultivation and building techniques.

When a woman named Sigrid, born into the high nobility, deeded the immense estate called Varnhem to the Cistercians, the monks were given the opportunity to build what would be the largest monastery in medieval Sweden. Built between 1150 and 1260 and modelled on German and French monasteries, the location was ideal. It was private yet in the midst of superb cultivation and grazing lands. It was blessed with forests providing timber and game, while the proximity to mount Billingen ensured the brothers of stone for buildings, as well as clean water and waterpower.

The monastic community was divided in two – ordained monks and lay brothers. Their motto was Ora et labora or pray and work, a phrase that well described life at Varnhem. This is where Arn was sent to learn. He was placed in the monastery as an oblat, that is as a child serving God. The gesture was an offering by Arn’s parents Sigrid and Magnus as thanks to the Lord for his miraculous return from the dead. The monks teach Arn

Varnhem is the burial site for the House of Erik, including such dignitaries as Regent Birger jarl, his wife, and Count Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie. A thorough five-year restoration begun in 1918 recreated the medieval character of the church. The ruins after the monastery along the south side of the church were also excavated at this time. During the 1920s a museum was built to allow for summertime visits.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The monastery church is open:

April, daily 10–16; May–Aug, daily 9–18; Sept, daily 12–16. Closed holiday evenings.

Group tours by arr. on +46-(0)511-603 70 or 605 11.

Monastery garden cafe, +46-(0)511-801 96 or 604 30.

Skara turistbyrå, +46-(0)511-325 80.

The abbey of Varnhem” leaflet.

“Birger jarl” Medieval museum of Stockholm.

For additional reading in English ask at the museum or the tourist bureaux.
Through the centuries, the Eriksberg parish and its medieval church have of tradition been connected to the royal house of Erik. It is thought that the family stems from here and that one of its most legendary representatives, namely Erik the Holy (Erik Jedvardsson) built the old church on his hereditary estate. This he did for love of his native district and to create a family shrine.

This 12th century church has at times been used as a magazine and has been threatened with demolition. Now it is lovingly renovated and holds a number of interesting furnishings, including a medieval reliquary (a replica) and an altar that probably stood here from the very beginning. The frescos from the 11 and 1200s can still be seen and are among the oldest in Sweden. In the forefront are two royal figures crowned by double glorias. There is a place for hiding relics in the middle of the church and an unusual stairway to heaven in the sanctuary. Outside the edifice a stone to the memory of King Knut Eriksson, raised some 800 years after his death in 1196. It is here in Eriksberg that Knut Eriksson, king and Arn’s good friend, chooses to live out his days far from the protection of stone walls and armed men.

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Tourist information
The church is open daily, 08–20. You can arrange to have Bertil Helgesson (+46-(0)515-430 24) or Arnold Gustavsson (+46-(0)515-430 77) guide you round the church and its surrounds. Coffee, homebaked and various exhibitions are offered at the Prästgården parsonage. For bookings, call the Eriksberg Culture and Friends Association, Birgitta Larsson (+46-(0)515-430 49).

more reading
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