

The Large Entrance gate, built of fallen tree trunks, turned with the roots upwards. At the top, the double cross and the rising sun.

This tin dragon with a knight on horseback stood for many years at the top of the tall chimney of the sanatorium's main building. The dragon symbolizes tuberculosis and the knight represented the doctors who fought against it. Their battle, in the chimney's drifting smoke, must have been an impressive sight.



On the cover: The Bridge over the Deep Ravine. Photo: Jonas Ingman
Text, drawings and map: Kerstin Ljungqvist

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Kroppefjäll Sanatorium

The buildings in the park, now known as Kroppefjällsparken, were originally a sanatorium,* a hospital for patients with pulmonary tuberculosis, also called consumption or TB. Tuberculosis is an infectious disease that most often attacks the lungs. It spread rapidly during the 19th century, largely due to industrialisation, urban growth, and overcrowded living conditions. For a long time, tuberculosis was one of the leading causes of death in Sweden, second only to old age.

For many years the disease was considered incurable. The only known relief was rest, nutritious food, and plenty of fresh air, things often hard to find at home. Therefore, special hospitals called sanatoriums were built, where patients could receive the best possible care and enjoy plenty of clean air, often in open-air rest halls.

Sanatoriums were ideally located in elevated areas, surrounded by forests and lakes, with good transport connections. Kroppefjäll, with its pure, high-altitude air, was considered ideal for the purpose. The nearby village also had a railway station.

Dals Rostock has long traditions as a health resort. For nearly two hundred years, from the mid-18th century until 1948, the village hosted a mineral spring and bathing establishment. Between 1885 and 1935, it was also a centre for cultivating medicinal plants for the country's pharmacies.

Many small houses

Kroppefjäll Sanatorium was completed in 1911, but it was expanded several times afterwards. Unlike most other sanatoriums, it followed the colony model – consisting of several small houses instead of one large hospital building. The idea was that patients would feel more at ease in small cottages than in a large institutional facility.

By creating environments that resembled home life, doctors hoped to strengthen patients' healthy side and stimulate the body's self-healing powers. The separate houses also made it less likely for other diseases to spread between patients.

The fight against tuberculosis

For many years, Sweden had one of the world's best-organised systems for treating tuberculosis. After the Second World War, the country even received many lung patients who were survivors from the concentration camps.

*The word "sanatorium" comes from the Latin sano, meaning "to heal." Almost sixty sanatoriums were built in Sweden, most of them during the first two decades of the 20th century

Doctors and researchers waged an intense battle against the disease, and by the mid-1940s, the first effective medicines had been developed. Together with vaccination programmes and improved living conditions, these new treatments caused the death rate to fall rapidly. By the 1950s, the sanatoriums could begin to close down.

However, tuberculosis has not been eradicated. It remains one of the world's most widespread infectious diseases. Each year, around ten million people fall ill, mostly in Africa and Asia, and about one million die.

After the sanatorium

The sanatorium at Kroppefjäll remained in operation until 1960. Between 1963 and 1991, the site was used as a residential home for people with intellectual disabilities.

Today, most of the houses are privately owned. The former sanatorium buildings now host a Bed & Breakfast, private homes, small businesses, and childcare facilities.

Doktor Sædén

No person left a greater mark on Kroppefjäll Sanatorium than Carl Viktor Sædén (1880–1966). He served as chief physician from 1916 to 1945.

Beyond his work as a doctor, Sædén was a visionary and imaginative artist. Like many people of his time, he was inspired by national romantic ideals and deeply fascinated by Swedish history, especially the pagan era and the old Norse myths. In the struggles of the ancient Norse heroes against the forces of darkness, he saw a parallel to his patients' fight against tuberculosis. In the magical, varied landscape around the sanatorium, he created walking paths and placed monuments along the trails, each with its own symbolic meaning. The natural environment was to be disturbed as little as possible; many of the logs used came from fallen trees, often set with their roots pointing upwards.

Fresh air and culture

The area surrounding the sanatorium, with all its paths and monuments, was lovingly called "Our Park" by Doctor Sædén. He devoted much of his free time to maintaining and developing it. Heavy work was done by the sanatorium's staff, but patients who felt well enough were welcome to help.

The park and the surrounding nature contributed greatly to both the

patients' well-being and their recovery. They were encouraged to take strengthening walks along the many trails, where benches for rest were placed at regular intervals. During these walks, lungs and bodies were kept in motion. At the monuments and viewpoints there was room for reflection.

One of Doctor Sædén's passions was to stage small plays, known as "tableaux", often with historical or mythological themes. Both patients, staff and their children took part, dressed as characters from legend and history. Most performances took place indoors, but sometimes they were staged outdoors at temples or stone formations, that in many cases were built with such events in mind.

Restored

Over the years, many of the monuments fell into decay. Some collapsed, some rotted, others became overgrown or were removed to make way for new buildings.

Between 1990 and 1996, an extensive restoration project was carried out. Since 2007, the area around Kroppefjällsparken and the nearby lake Mörttjärn has been a municipal nature reserve.

During 2024–2025, the monuments have once again been restored, carefully reconstructed according to the original designs.

Symbols

In the fight against tuberculosis, the double cross was often used as a symbol. It appeared, for example, on letter seals and post-cards sold to raise money for research and healthcare.

The double cross originated from the patriarchal cross in the Orthodox Christian tradition, a symbol long associated with the struggle against evil. It is also known as the Cross of Lorraine.

A symbol that particularly fascinated Doctor Sædén was Saint George and the Dragon. Saint George was a popular medieval saint. According to legend, a man-eating dragon terrorised the people of Lydia* and just as the king's daughter was about to be sacrificed to the beast, George appeared and slew the dragon. The story has often been used as a symbol for the struggle against various enemies. In this context, the dragon represented tuberculosis, the knight symbolised medical science and the king's daughter represented the afflicted.



* Present-day Turkey.

Doctor Sædén's Trail

Join us for a cultural and historical walk through varied natural surroundings! Along the paths you will find 24 monuments, each with its own symbolism. The end of this text shows the trail.

The map at the end shows the network of trails. Doctor Sædén's Walk is marked with black dots. Each site is numbered on the map.

The entire route is about 2.7 kilometres long and marked with red signs with the double cross. You can walk the full route, or choose parts of it.

1. The walk begins at the **Large Gate**, built from tree trunks turned upside down with their roots facing upwards. At the top of the gate, the rising sun symbolises hope and recovery, while above it stands the double cross, representing the fight against the disease.
2. Follow the gravel road to the left of the gate for about 100 metres. On the right-hand side, you'll see a group of large stones forming a great **Double Cross**. Around it, more stones are arranged in the shape of an oval shield, the Shield of the Double Cross, a symbolic protection in the battle against tuberculosis.

At the base of the cross, on a separate stone, are the engraved names of people whose discoveries brought relief and healing to the sick:

*Foremost among the fighters stood: Pasteur, Koch, Röntgen, Forlanini, Saugman, Jacobaeus, Brauer, Schmidt, Sauerbruch, Neander.
The stones were raised in 1938.*

Beside it are also the words:

*Long is the battle line, hard the fight; brave men bleed, noble ones fall.
Let stones stand. Hold the shield-mark in remembrance.*

Robert Koch, from Germany, discovered the tuberculosis bacterium in the early 1880s. Louis Pasteur, from France, showed how the bacteria could be killed by heating, a method later known as pasteurisation. Wilhelm Röntgen discovered X-rays, and Forlanini developed a method of introducing nitrogen gas into the lungs to improve healing, a treatment that was also used at Kroppefjäll.

The other names belong to doctors, professors and researchers who all played key roles in the struggle against the disease.

Continue along the road for a bit further. Notice the **yew trees** growing on both sides. Doctor Sædén was very proud of the old yew trees that surrounded the sanatorium. The wood of the yew is both strong and flexible, and since ancient times it was used to make crossbows and longbows, another fitting symbol for the battle against tuberculosis. In pagan times, the yew tree was regarded as sacred, ever-green and dedicated to the Norse god Ull, also known as the Bow God.

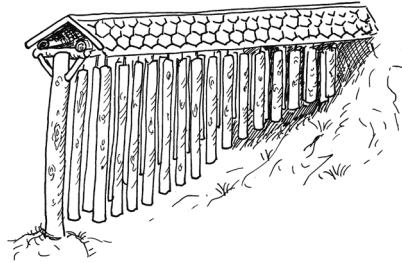
3. Follow the path on the left leading upwards towards the scenic viewpoint Brattås. At the beginning of the trail stands **Vala's Harp**. In Norse mythology, a vala or völva was a seeress or shaman believed to have answers about the future. Perhaps Doctor Sædén was inspired by a verse from a poem of Viktor Rydberg:

*Listen, listen deep from mountains,
Hear a tone not yet forgotten,
From the ancient Vala's harp –
Song of warriors, song of poets!*

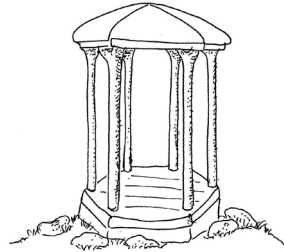
The harp is also known as an Aeolian harp, named after Aeolus, the Greek god of the winds.

An Aeolian harp is meant to be played by the wind, something that was possible in Sædén's time when the forest was more open. The original harp was also taller than today's and had metal rods hanging between the logs.

Try playing the harp yourself – strike the logs gently with a stick. They are tuned like a piano: white keys to the right, black keys to the left, though the pitch may vary depending on the weather.

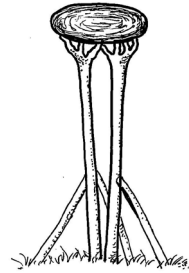


4. A little further along, on a rocky ledge to the right, stands **the Echo Temple**. Its domed ceiling is designed to create echoes if you stand directly beneath it and call out. Echo temples like this were very popular features in 18th-century romantic gardens.



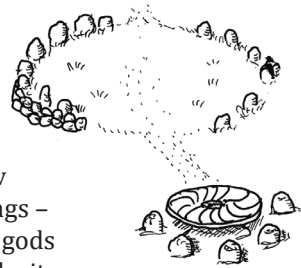
5. Just above the Echo Temple rises **the Fire Bowl**. Such fire bowls, or beacons, were common in romantic parks and gardens around the turn of the 20th century. They recalled the ancient signal fires once lit on mountaintops to send warnings between distant settlements.

Dr. Sædén would light a fire here on festive occasions or during one of his mythological plays. In those plays, the fire on the hill could symbolise a warning to the people that “enemies” were approaching.



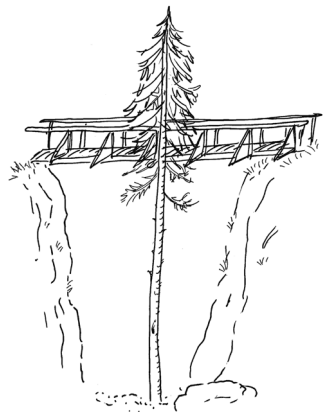
6. A path to the right of the Fire Bowl leads to **the Thing Site**. A little further on, just above Vala’s Harp, stands a **Stone Table** made from an old millstone. In its centre, you can see a double cross and the year 1936. The place is inspired by how gatherings for debate and judgement – things – were held in ancient times. Both the Norse gods and our ancestors were said to meet at such sites, a parallel to today’s courts. Dr. Sædén imagined the chieftains sitting at the table while their followers waited on the open assembly place nearby, a parallel to today’s courtrooms.

During the sanatorium era, however, the stone table served a gentler purpose: visitors came here to drink coffee and enjoy their picnics.



7. Following the path back past the Fire Bowl and turning left, you’ll come to two wooden bridges, one smaller and one larger. If you’re lucky, you might catch a glimpse of **the Troll** – people say it lives just beyond the bridges, often perched high on a nearby rock, watching passers-by.

8. Then cross the large bridge, known as **the Bridge Over the Deep Ravine**. Here, you can walk among the treetops and experience nature from a bird’s-eye view.

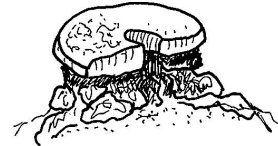


9. After the big bridge, you'll reach **The Wide View**, the highlight of Brattås. On a clear day, you can see across Lake Vänern all the way to Kinnekulle.

Perhaps it was here that the patient F. O. Myrén found inspiration for the Song of Dalsland:

*Did you see a land that rises gently from
the shores of Lake Vänern towards Kroppefjäll?
Then know that this land is Dalsland!*

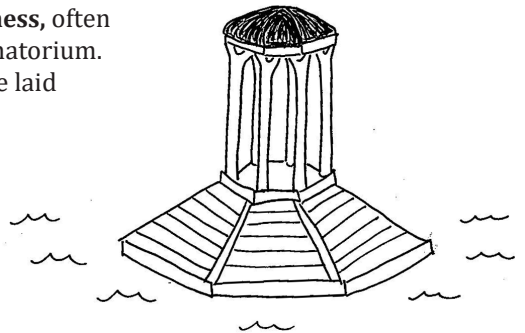
Beneath the half-millstone, you'll notice three openings, "cannon mouths," pointing in three directions, symbolically guarding against enemies.



Then follow the wide path downhill towards Kroppefjällsparken, crossing the road and passing the former stables and carriage sheds. At the southern end of the lake, the sanatorium once had gardens for flowers and vegetables. There was also a henhouse here that supplied the patients with fresh eggs.

10. Now the path continues around the lake. Sædén called it "The Mountain Lake" and praised its beauty. To heighten the impression, he created an artificial island – **The Island of Happiness**, often shown on early postcards from the sanatorium. To make it look natural, moss was once laid around the small temple.

Like good health, happiness can be difficult to reach – yet it remains there, waiting for those who finds their way.



11. On the shore opposite Kroppefjällsparken stand several upright stones and a temple, together known as **Hansehagen**, named after King Hans, who ruled the Nordic countries in the late 1400s.

Inside the so-called Memorial Temple are iron oil lamps and outside stand two fire bowls. On ceremonial evenings, fires were lit here in memory of the departed.

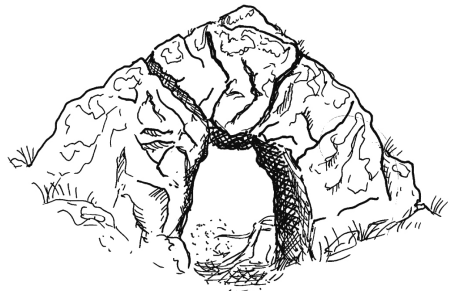
During the sanatorium period, Hansehagen was sometimes used for Norse saga plays — mythological performances that might, for instance, tell of Vikings arriving in their ships to lay offerings on the flat rocks. Doctor Sædén even had a small Viking ship built, moored on the opposite shore.

12. If you turn off the path and go up to the left, you'll come to **The Eye of the Needle**, a narrow passage in the rock that you can crawl through. If you prefer to take the stairs, you can do that instead.

According to old Nordic folk beliefs, a person could be cured of illness by crawling or being pulled through a tight opening.



13. Above the Eye of the Needle, the path continues northwards and back down towards the main trail. Here you pass beneath **The Gate of Humility**, formed naturally by big rocks. To pass through, you must bow your head – a symbolic gesture of humility.



14. At the northern end of the lake lies **the Mountain Church**, a natural outdoor church with stone benches, choir gallery, altar rail, and pulpit. Above the altar stands a cross watching over the site.

During the sanatorium years, open-air services were often held here, a tradition that continues today. When the bishop consecrated the church in 1921, he remarked that he had never stood in a church with a higher roof – for this one has the sky as its ceiling.

15. A short distance beyond the church, you'll find **The Dragon**, built of stones. With a little imagination, you can see it mid-battle, lunging at the knight while the poor maiden kneels in prayer on the rock above. The dragon symbolises tuberculosis; the knight represents medical science and the maiden stands for the suffering patients. According to Dr. Sædén, the creature also represented “evil speech”,



gossip and slander among people. On a slate plaque nearby, the following words are engraved:

*The dragon crept around the mountain,
poisonous blood flowed from tooth and tongue;
never did a knight's armour still the dragon's power.*

Even the knights could not conquer evil speech, and the “poisonous blood” continues to flow — in this case, literally. Water runs from the dragon’s jaws, fed by a hidden pipe from a spring higher up the mountain.

16. A simple staircase leads up to **The Hill of Devotion** marked by raised stones and extensive rock carvings. The text expresses gratitude to those who made it possible to build the sanatorium, and to those who dedicated their work there. In essence, the words honour the *fighters against the people's disease and the donors who gave fields, forests, and mountains to create Kroppefjäll Sanatorium.*

Next to the text, another carving reads:
Carved by a healed man, known as Black Karlsson.

On Walpurgis Night, the traditional spring festival, doctor Sædén would stand here and give his spring speech to the gathered crowd below. With a powerful voice he would declaim:

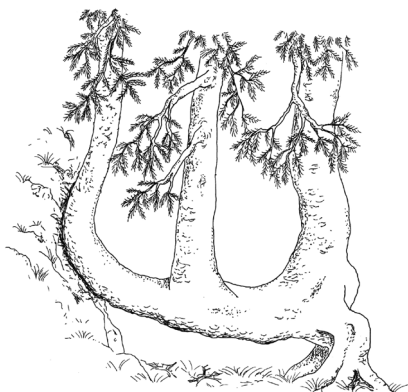
*Awaken, all hearts of the North, from your long winter sleep!
Listen again to the voices that speak of noble deeds!
Awaken, awaken to life, you who have wrestled long with death! **

* From a poem, written by the poet Viktor Rydberg.

17. Following the path down again and turning right, then left across a small meadow, you'll find a staircase leading up to **the Triple Spruce**, a tree that likely fell during a storm but continued to grow with three stems.

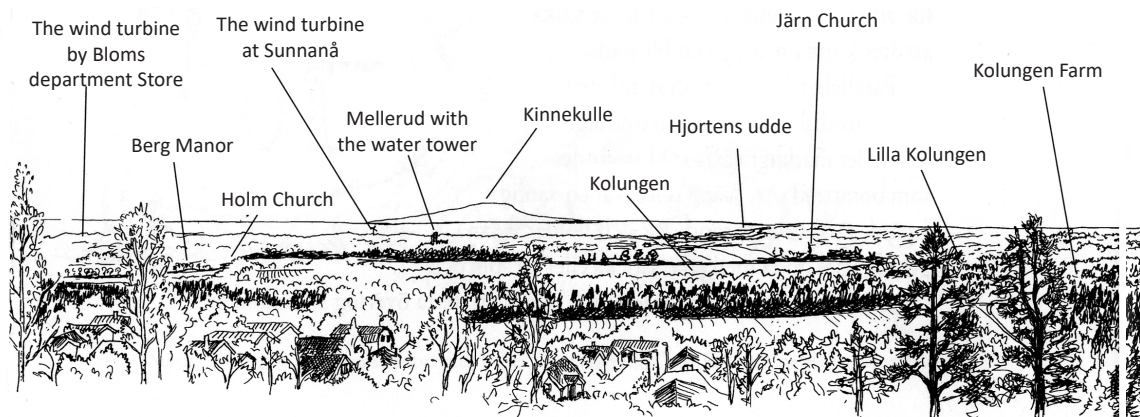
This remarkable tree is also a symbol of the sanatorium's mission: helping the sick to rise again and grow strong.

The tree also connects to old Nordic folk beliefs, where unusually shaped or giant trees were thought to possess healing powers. A common custom was to "transfer" illness to a tree: one would prick the sore spot with a wooden splinter or nail, then insert it into the trunk, believing the tree would absorb the disease.



18. Back on the main trail, a steep path on the left leads up to **the Observation Tower**. Below it are the stone foundations of the original tower from the sanatorium period.

From the top, the panorama stretches far and wide. On clear days you can see Lake Vänern, Kinnekulle and, in the far south, the twin mountains Halle- and Hunneberg.



19. A bit north of the tower is a stone setting called **East Towards the Sun**. Here, you can sit and watch the sunrise, and in the large rock the rising sun is carved into the stone. The place reminds us that each new day carries the promise of light and recovery.

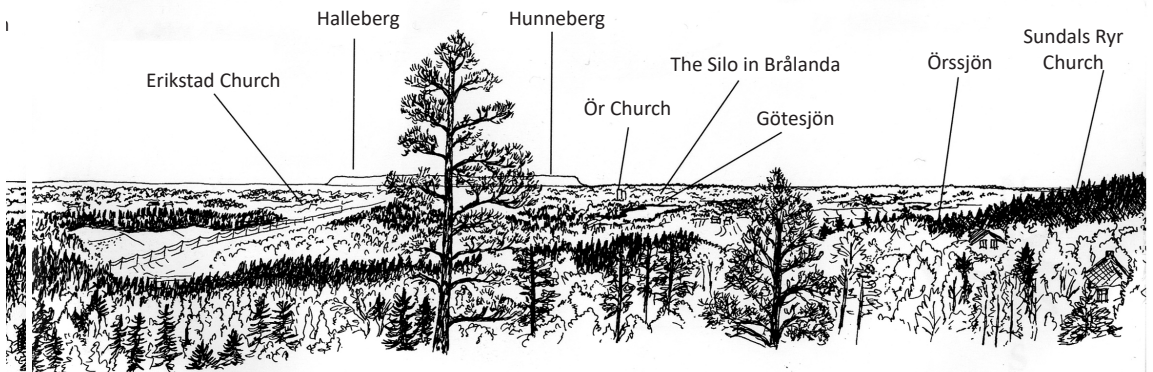
It was once meant to balance another site, West of the Moon, a now vanished site on the far side of the lake. The names are inspired from an old tale: *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*. Together, the two places form a symbolic image of life's rhythm, from night to day – from illness to health.

20. Further along the path back towards Kroppefällsparken, the forest suddenly opens up to reveal an **Open-Air Stage**, complete with rows of stone benches. The actors' "dressing rooms" were once located in the roomlike space behind the stage.

Theatre and performance were considered part of the healing process. The joy of acting and watching helped patients and staff alike to forget illness and suffering, if only for a while.

21. Next to the playground, by the main building, stands a **Sundial** from the sanatorium period. As the sun moves across the sky, the shadow cast by the central rod indicates the hour of the day.

Inside the wide ring, the sun god Helios travels across the sky in a golden chariot, drawn by four fiery horses, a symbol of the day's journey from dawn to dusk. On the outer edge, the twelve signs of the zodiac can be seen.



22. Further down in the park stands a proud **Monument**, raised in honour of those who donated funds to build and maintain the sanatorium.
23. By the parking area stands **the Snöfrid Stone**, carved with words meant to inspire reflection. Below this spot once stood the sanatorium's mortuary, and the path leading to it began with these solemn lines:

*For the runes of the brave life read thus: draw your sword against greedy giants, bleed bravely for the weak, gladly forgo, never complain, fight a hopeless fight, and nameless die. **

On the back of the stone, another inscription reads:

The doctor let the strong man Mod raise the stone in 1923, in memory of those who suffered heroically.

Where the mortuary once stood, there is now a preschool, and the place is filled with life.



24. Our walk ends at **the Memorial Stone** with a bronze relief of Doctor Sædén. It was created in 1995 by the artist Britt-Marie Jern. This marks the end of the trail he created, where nature and symbolic monuments helped to support patients on their way to recovery.



Doctor Sædén and Vala's harp.

* From a poem, written by the poet Viktor Rydberg.

1. The Large Gate
2. The Double Cross
3. Vala's Harp
4. The Echo Temple
5. The Fire Bowl
6. The Thing Site
and the Stone Table
7. The Troll
8. The Bridge Over
the Deep Ravine
9. The Wide View
10. The Island of Happiness
11. The Memorial Temple
in Hansehagen
12. The Eye of the Needle
13. The Gate of Humility
14. The Mountain Church
15. The Dragon
16. The Hill of Devotion
17. The Triple Spruce
18. The Observation Tower
19. East Towards the Sun
20. The Open-Air Stage
21. The Sundial
22. The Memorial Monument
23. The Snöfrid Stone
24. The Memorial Stone