

# HØNEFOSSEN BEFORE HØNEFOSS



When Hønefossen flooded in the summer of 2023, it served as a powerful reminder of the immense power the waterfall possesses. Though now tamed and confined compared to its grandeur centuries ago, it continues to demonstrate its strength. The flood reminded us that here, we still live on the river's terms.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, sawmills dominated at Hønefossen, and the river's power was the very foundation of the growing community there. In this exhibition, we explore the lives of those who inhabited the area, delving into the small community by the waterfall that gradually evolved into the Hønefoss city we know today. How did people live? What sounds, smells, sights, and emotions would have shaped their everyday lives?



Hønefossen av Erik Pauelsen, 1788.  
Foto: Anders Sune Berg / Sore Kunstmuseum

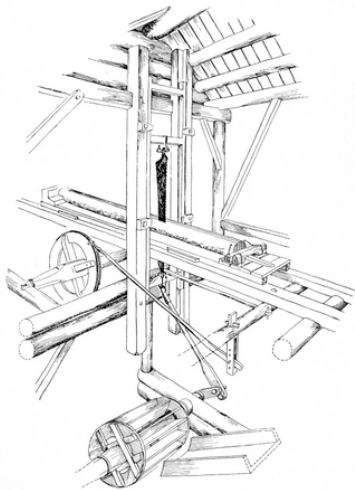
# WHERE THE RIVERS MEET

Hønefoss' strategic location between rivers played a crucial role in its development.

The rivers were utilized in two important ways: as a natural transportation route through log driving and as a power source for the sawmills.

Through log driving, large quantities of timber could be transported down the rivers from the forests to the sawmills by the waterfall.

At the same time, the hydropower was used directly at the sawmills to provide energy to the saw blades.



Skisse av de sentrale delene av en oppgangssag, tegnet av Arne Berg.  
Foto: Anno Norsk skogmuseum.



Del av illustrasjon hentet fra boken "Fysiske økonomiske Beskrivelse over Lier Præstegield i Aggershuus Stift i Norge" av J. Essendrop (Kiøbenhavn, 1761)

## FROM CRAFTSMANSHIP TO EARLY INDUSTRY

The lumber industry evolved from artisanal to early industrial with the invention and popularization of the hydropowered sawmill in the 16th century.

This innovation revolutionized business and propelled Norway's timber industry forward.

The first sawmill arrived at Hønefossen by the late 1500s, and within a century, more than 20 sawmills were in operation.

# SECONDARY LIVELIHOODS



Utsnitt av Lorentzen/Haas' Silkesagen ved Hønefossen.  
Foto: Nasjonalmuseet

The society surrounding the sawmills primarily comprised three groups: owners, foremen\*, and workers. While owners and foremen were financially secure, workers were the most numerous. Sawmill work was seasonal, and wages were often supplemented by other sources.

Initially, workers were often farmers or cottagers seeking extra income. Others, due to various factors like land scarcity or conflicts, turned to sawmills for employment. Sawmills thus provided a vital alternative for those unable to thrive in farming communities.

\*A sawmill foreman oversaw daily operations, representing the owner and handling legal matters.



## THE TAVERN

Women have always been active participants in the workforce, alongside men. While men worked at the sawmill during the summer season, it was often women who managed the daily farm operations. Additionally, women played a central role in the economic landscape around the waterfall. By operating taverns and brewing beer and spirits for sale, women could contribute to the family's income while also pursuing their professional lives on their own terms.

# SUMMER COMMUNITY

People who didn't reside near the waterfall throughout the rest of the year would flock there in the summer to work, and it's during this time of year that the small community by the river would truly come alive.

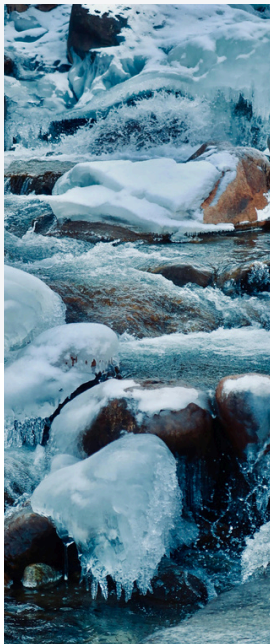


The roar of the waterfall would dominate the soundscape, accompanied by the noise of people and the rhythmic cutting of timber logs by saw blades at the sawmills.



Vannhjul til oppgangssag fra Kvam. Foto: Svein Høikstad

# WINTER SILENCE



Winter brought quiet to the waterfall. With the sawmills closed, many workers vanished. Those residing nearby endured the cold until they could resume work, breaking the ice from the saws.

The thundering roar of the waterfall would be naturally muffled by snow and ice, replaced by the sound of raw, cold timber creaking and water trickling in an otherwise relatively quiet winter landscape.

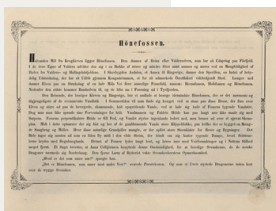
# CONTEMPORARY DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PEOPLE

"Those who live and work at the sawmills are mostly lazy and shameful people; because they don't work at the sawmills except in the summer. In the winter, they do nothing and live off what they earned in the summer, or on credit until next year. And when that's not enough, they somehow exploit others' sweat and labor. [...] This is how the parents live, and this is how the children are raised, which is why such places are convenient military recruiting grounds. Both parents and children are mostly seen just sitting around and getting drunk. In the winter; they send the children out to beg and steal, something they are very skilled at. Otherwise, they don't care about anything, whether they have something or not; if they have something, they eat and drink it up right away; if they have nothing, they starve and follow this saying carelessly: "Do not worry about tomorrow."

§. 123.  
Men fra Bønderne maac exciperes de, som boe og opfoedes ved Saugbrægens, hvilke ere for det meste et ladt og lideligt Folk; thi som de ikke faae paa Saug uden om Sommeren, faa faae de sig ganske til Orkesløshed om Vinteren; og taere paa det, de enten kan have forjænt om Sommeren, eller paa ny Regning til efterfølgende Aar; og naar det ikke kan faae til, benytte de sig paa en eller anden Maade af andres Sved og Arbejde.

Et capiant vitium, ni moveantur, aqvæ.  
Saaledes leve Forældre, og saaledes opdrages Børnene, hvorfors der og ved saadanne Steder ere bekvemme Hvervingspladse, hvor de Geyobne have godt Tilløb. Forældre og Børn ere saadanne, at man enten seer dem at fylde sig eller strække sig paa Benkene om Vinteren; Børnene udcommandere de til at betle og stjæle paa eensang, og disse Haandverker ere de ret behændige til. For Resten bekymre de sig om ingen Ting, enten de have noget eller ej; have de noget, æde og drikke de det strax op; have de intet, fulde de og føre ubekymret dette Mundheld: Quid sit futurum cras, fuge qvæere.

Fogd Ivar Wiel, Topographisk Journal for Norge (1743)



"One and a half miles from Krokkleiva lies Hønefossen. [...] The traveler who visits Ringerike should not avoid visiting Hønefossen [...] In the summer, one will find themselves standing on these bridges that span the river and staring out at the moving, foaming, high-sprouting masses of water, letting themselves be bathed by the sprinkles of the waterfall. [...] In the midst of [the waterfall], large stone formations rise where a number of sawmills and mills

have been built. Where these natural foundations are missing, large stone support structures have been erected to support bridges and buildings. The whole thing almost looks like a small town in the middle of the wild current, throwing out steaming vapor, where the sunbeams break in rainbow glow. The sound of the waterfall is heard far away and is especially clear during weather changes and in the stillness of the night far away."

Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, Norge fremstillet i Tegninger (1848)



# A GROWING COMMUNITY

The population increased as more and more workers settled near the waterfall. Alongside those who took jobs at the sawmills, a variety of other craftsmen with different backgrounds and skills also arrived, including tanners, coopers, hatters, tanners, and potters. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly how many people lived at Hønefossen in the 16th and 17th centuries, but the steady increase in population during this period is evident. According to fogd Ivar Wiel, in the mid-1700s there were approximately 35 inhabited cottages scattered among the sawmills at Hønefossen, and by the census of 1845, there were a total of 793 registered inhabitants in Hønefoss

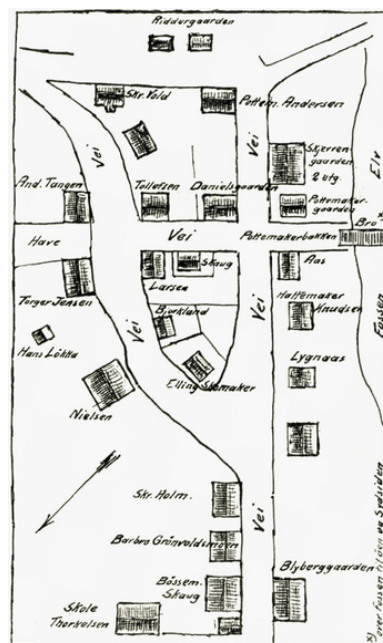


# THE POTTERS IN POTTEMAKERBAKKEN

The pottery was located in the area we today know as Pottemakerbakken, on the north side of Hønefossen. It was in operation from 1720 until it was closed down during the 1850s.

The objects you can see here were made at this pottery. They stand due to their artistic quality, and can be compared with the highly respected pottery art of Trøndelag.

The reason for the closure of the pottery is unfortunately unknown, but the rise of larger factories and the mass production of goods in the latter half of the 19th century may have led to the decline of many artisanal traditions, as they were overshadowed by factory production.



Skisse av E.M. Færden (1915) over Nordsiden i Hønefoss, cirka år 1852

# THE RIDDER FAMILY AND RESIDENCE

The Ridder family first settled at Hønefossen in the 1730s. The first of the "Ridders" was Christopher Ridder, a woodcarver by trade. Their estate, Riddergården, built by Christopher's nephew Fredrik Ridder between 1780 and 1790.



Riddergården

Riddergården served as the family's home, initially as a residence and eventually as a vacation spot, until 1969.

The Ridder family were foremen at the sawmills, and several of them also served as log driving inspectors, accountants, and merchants at Hønefossen for generations. The history of Riddergården and the Ridder family is closely intertwined with the sawmill history of Hønefoss. Around the same time Hønefoss gained city status, industrial factories began to replace sawmill operations along the river, signaling the end of the era of the sawmill foremen as well.



Glavved Hotel





Most people who settled by the waterfall didn't own many things, and the few possessions they had weren't considered valuable enough to preserve for posterity. In the process of creating this exhibition, we faced a challenge: How do we convey the history of life by the waterfall without the physical objects typically associated with a museum? Behind each of these absent objects lies valuable stories, lives, and experiences. These stories are important, and they deserve to be told.

Fortunately, skilled local historians have dedicated considerable effort to documenting and preserving these stories over the years. For further reading, here's a list of selected literature used in creating this exhibition:

*Hønefoss 1: Sagbruk og sagarbeidere 1600-1800.* Andreas Ropeid. (1952)  
*Hønefoss. Byens historie.* Utgitt av Hønefoss Kommune (1915)  
*Med Hønefoss i sentrum.* Jan Helge Østlund. (2002)  
*Norge fremstillet i Tegninger.* Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1848)  
*Pottemakeriet i Hønefoss.* Heftet Ringerike (1963)  
*Riddergaarden og Familien Ridder.* Grete Borgersrud. (2008)  
*Topographisk Journal for Norge.* Fogd Ivar Wiel (1743)