

Magical White Cliffs of Mons Klint



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Fancy discovering a fossil or two? Just bring your brushes to Mons Klint on the island of Mon in South Zealand, Denmark. I may not be Indiana Jones, but I simply grabbed the opportunity to see the cliffs when my Danish host kindly offered to drive us there.

It took us nearly three hours to get there from Copenhagen because we stopped a few times along the way to see the mills, wheat fields and little villages. Blame the tourist in me, but these were too picturesque to just drive through and be content with looking out the car window.

As we got close to the cliffs, a peaceful forest opened up to reveal a futuristic building – Geocenter Mons Klint. This geological museum first opened in 2007. Most of the structure was built underground to reduce the effect on the environment as it would have looked out of place amidst the lush green forest. Visiting the museum was like taking a crash course in the cliffs formation and fossils you could unearth such as octopus, sea urchin or mussel.

The 7km-long Mons Klint itself is a spectacular sight of bright white chalk cliffs, a stunning contrast against the blue and green shades of the Baltic Sea. Some 70 million years ago, Denmark was under the sea, lands were raised and mountains were formed. The chalky prehistoric ocean floor was uncovered after the ice from the last Ice Age (dated 12,000 years ago) melted. The chalk came from settled micro-organisms which were compressed in the

ancient seabed. That explains why the country is generally flat; at 128m, Mons Klint is already the highest point in the country.

This highest point of the cliffs is also called “The Queen’s Chair” or known locally as Dronningestolen (photo). According to a romantic legend, whenever the Cliff King sailed off on an expedition, the Queen would sit there and watch out over the ocean.

During the Ice Age, the limestone was pushed to the surface by glaciers covering northern Europe. It did not stop there. The cliffs are still changing and 20-40cm have disappeared into the sea.

Just a few years back, in 2007, a grand cliff formation called Store Taler, collapsed by 100m due to erosion and moved horizontally into the Baltic Sea by another 300m. Although you can still see the fallen cliff as a white peninsula, it will, in due course, be swallowed by the sea. I wouldn’t be surprised if the cliffs I saw a couple of years ago looked slightly different today.

There are several trails available which provide different views. We trekked the 267m-long wooden boardwalk along the edge of the cliffs; this had an amazing view of the Baltic Sea and the rich bird life.

We were lucky that the day was clear and we could even see neighbouring Sweden and Germany. We also saw the world’s fastest animal (no, not the cheetah!), the peregrine falcon. These majestic birds had almost become extinct, but the natural caves on the steep chalky cliffs provided them with ideal nests for breeding. So after a spell of 30 years, they can now be seen again.

Apart from the birds (and butterflies too), Mons Klint is famous for orchids which flourish here due to the high content of limestone in the soil. Go on a hike in the virgin forest and you can see a number of rare orchids, including 20 different species of wild orchids. As tempting as it may be, you are not allowed to pick the flowers as they are all protected.

There is a huge rock in the middle of the trail and one cannot help but wonder where it came from. Legend had it that a Swedish sorceress, outraged that Christianity was spreading in the north, used her garter to hurl a granite stone at the church of Magleby, 5km from the cliffs. However, the stone only hit the church tower, ricocheted and landed in the forest.

I cannot say if the legends are real, but I do know Mons Klint is definitely magical. ■