



**Sons of Norway**  
**HERITAGE PROGRAMS**



## MiniPresentation#43

**HUNTING**

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Traditional **Norwegian folk tales** about trolls and princesses are relatively well known in Norwegian America. Less known are the many other tales and legends which also are a part of Norway's folklore—the tales which reflect daily life in old time Norway—for instance, stories about hunting and fishing. There is a wealth of such tales, most of them a little larger than life. But then we all know that all hunters' tales need a varnish of the improbable, even the fantastic. And a really good hunter's story has much in common with a noble wine or cheese—it needs ripening in order to reach the stage when it can be subject to the most sublime enjoyment.

One of the many such stories is the tale about **Mikkel Haresteinom** (MIH'kehl 'HAH'reh'stey'nohm)—a legendary hunter from the mountain community of Vågå (VOHG'GOH)—and his reindeer-hunt in the Rondane mountains. He was after a reindeer buck which he had shot at and wounded. He found the animal lying on the ground and bent over to cut its throat, but the buck sprang to its feet and dashed off. Mikkel grabbed on to its hind legs and was dragged along. When the two of them struggled up a hill, he tried to gain a foothold and stop the wild flight. Instead, he was thrown up and forwards and ended up between the horns of the buck. But Mikkel didn't give up—he wrestled the animal to the ground and the fight was over.

Another hunting story involving a reindeer is the tale about **Gullbrand Glesne** (GUHLL'bran 'GLES'neh) who grabbed the horns of a buck he was hunting and was thrown on to the animal's back. Then the reindeer dashed out on the narrow bridge of rock separating the mountain lakes of Gjende (YEN 'deh) and Bessvatn (BESS 'vahtn) with Gullbrand holding on for dear life. Suddenly the buck jumped off the bridge and down they went 1,200 feet straight into the lake. Both buck and man swam to shore and, of course, the outcome of it all was that the brave buck lost its life. Dramatist Henrik Ibsen heard this hunting tale and used it in his drama "Peer Gynt", where it is an important part of the first act.

We can safely assume that tales like these have been told for as long as man has been hunting. For hunting has never been just plain old bread-winning—it is steeped in an enchanting tradition of excited suspense, tall tales, mystic lore and proof of man- or womanhood. It also offers an outlet and camouflage for one's **Rambo tendencies**, although the average hunter probably never aspired to this character's level of violence.

People traveling in the Norwegian mountains will find innumerable proofs of hunting practices in earlier times, especially on the plateaus where a network of pit-traps for reindeer can still be seen and it is still possible for the lucky and observant hiker to find stone arrowheads and other hunting weapons. The hunt for reindeer, moose, hare or woodland birds might have been the best in terms of feeding one's family, but **hunting for beasts** of prey was definitely considered the most challenging. Noblest of all prey was the bear. Even renowned hunters lacked a certain ring to their name until they could boast a bear or two. A lot of hunters in modern Norway would probably agree to that, but have had no chance to prove themselves against the bear. The few bears which are left in Norway are protected from hunting the year round.