

A- THE BASIS FOR BREEDING AND JUDGING FJORD HORSES

The History of Norwegian Fjord Horse Breeding and the The Beginning of Organized Breeding

As mentioned in the chapter "A Short History of the Breed", there have been Fjord Horses in Norway since prehistoric times, but organized breeding formally started between 1840 and 1850. In 1843 it was decided to found a government stud farm at Hjerkinn on the Dovre mountains at a height of 1000 metres above sea level. Generally, the plan was to improve Norwegian breeding .

The Fjord was used on the farm for different tasks, logging and timber in the winter, and harvesting in the summer. The Fjord was also used as a packhorse and in lighter driving, for instance to church on Sunday. It was used extensively as a post horse and for the transport of goods.

A stallion and six mares of the "original Norwegian breed", the Fjord, were purchased by the state as a base for the stud at Hjerkinn.

Little was known about the genetics of colour. As in that time uls dun was very popular (statistic shows; between 1857 - 79 48,0% of the approved stallions were uls dun and between 1860 - 79 46,8% of the registered mares were uls dun) all this breeding stock was uls dun. Of the 32 foals born on the stud, 15 were white with blue eyes, showing up dramatically what happens by mating within this colour, but without anybody understanding why this happened. So because of this and the fact that the stud was poorly managed it was decided to close down the stud. *)

The government then decided to purchase stallions that could be used by breeders. Statsagronom (government appointed agronomist) Lindeqvist found no Fjord stallions which he "considered suitable for improving the breed". Instead some Dølehest stallions (Gudbrandsdals horse) were stationed in Vestlandet, thus giving governmental approval to cross-breeding.

The first show in Vestlandet the "West country" was held in Førde in 1864. Up to 1875 an annual show alternated between the counties of Møre og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane and Hordaland. After 1875 two annual shows were held including Rogaland in the southwest. From 1895 onwards, annual shows were arranged in each of the four counties in the west.

In 1875 the government began buying quality Fjord stallions, which were stationed in the main breeding districts in Western Norway. Between 1870 and 1880 the counties began buying their own stallions, and like the government owned stallions, these travelled from district to district. The last of these stallions was removed in 1937.

*) See in chapter A-"The Colours of the Fjord Horse and the Primitive Markings" and in chapter E-"Genetics of Colour"

Cross breeding Fjords with Dølehest led to a hot dispute when the breeders discovered the negative aspects of these offspring. In 1907 a meeting was held in Innvik, Nordfjord. There were many different points of view but subsequently it was accepted that only pure breeding was permissible and from this day forward the Fjord Horse has been maintained as a pure breed. This dispute is known as the Rimfakse debate after the crossbred stallion Rimfakse 146.

The Fjord Studbook and Register

Through the initiative of Det Kongelige Selskap for Norges Vel (The Royal Norwegian Society for Development), the first Studbook for the Fjord Horse was published in 1910. The studbook encompassed 308 stallions foaled between 1857 and 1904. Statens Stambokkontor (the Governmental Studbook Office), under the Ministry of Agriculture, was formed in 1918 and took over responsibility for the studbook. Until 1989 the studbook was an "elite" studbook where only evaluated mares and stallions, were entered. Today Norsk Hestesenter registers on behalf of Norges Fjordhestlag all Fjords that are eligible for the studbook in Norway.

Officially appointed Breeding Consultants

In the latter part of the 19th century, breeding consultants were appointed in the various districts to be responsible for animal husbandry. The West country was divided into two districts and the consultant was responsible for all the livestock. In 1922 Jens Nordang, a veterinary surgeon, was appointed as the first Breeding Consultant for the Fjord Horse. Over a period of time the system of government-owned stallions was disbanded and the funds transferred to the local breed societies. From 1967 all horse breeding was taken care of by one Breeding Consultant. From 1993 the leader of the breeding section at the Norsk Hestesenter has taken over the work of the "Statskonsulent".

Norsk Hestesenter - The Norwegian Horse Centre (NHS)

This foundation was formed in 1986 and encompasses the majority of horse breeding and other equestrian organisations. NHS has been appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture to be responsible for all horse breeding, registering, studbook keeping, evaluations and shows.

Public Breeding Regulations

Before 1941 all stallions could be used for breeding. In 1941 a law, "Lov om kåring av alshingstar", restricting the use of stallions, was introduced. From then on it was forbidden to use stallions that were not licensed. An owner could use his own stallion, licensed or not, on his own mares until the end of 2000. Apart from minor adjustments, this law was valid until 1994 after which a "Regulation for the approval of purebred equines" was introduced in agreement with the rules in the European Union.

Breeding Plans

In 1995 the Fjord Horse as the first breed in Norway was given a breeding plan, which acts as a base for all breeding. The principal aim is, "through pure breeding, the Norwegian Fjord Horse Society is responsible for maintaining the character and variety within the breed and to breed a healthy and functional horse which at all times can carry out the different functions for which it is bred". For the Fjord Horse this means to ensure a long-term progress to achieve the aims set in the breeding goals. The breeding plan should serve as a useful tool both for breeders and users of the Fjord and this again will ensure the future of the breed." Norway is accepted by the Rio-Convention on Biological Diversity and by the Commission of the European Union, as the country of origin (mother country) of the breed, and is responsible for looking after the breed and its character.

Breeder's Associations

The first local Fjord Horse association was formed in the eighteen nineties. Previously there had been some private interest groups, which had owned stallions. Local Fjord Horse associations could be made up of small rural community groups or wider districts, which later on amalgamated to form more economically viable societies. The aim of the local society was to own or stand the licensed stallions of the best quality. In 1943 there were 130 local societies in Norway and altogether 165 stallions. Some local associations owned more than one stallion. The largest local association, Jæren, had 11 stallions. During Jens Nordang's period, economic support for the purchase and keep of the stallions was introduced. In 2001 there were 51 local societies. Some of these groups are more interested in performance and various other activities with Fjords, and do not own a stallion.

Many local and district societies saw the need to amalgamate so as to form a stronger front and to ensure that they would be heard by the powers that be. The first was Nordfjord Fjordhestlag, which was founded in 1919. The others were formed in the thirties and forties.

Gradually it became apparent that there was a need for a national society so the county and district associations came together and founded Norges Fjordhestlag (Norwegian Fjord Horse Society, NFL for short), in 1949.

It is now possible to be a member of NFL without being a member of a local association, but it is the districts that still send representatives to the annual general meeting.

NFL took the initiative to form an international organisation for the Fjord Horse, and Fjord Horse International (FHI) was formed in 1997.

The Evaluation System:

From the beginning there were separate classes for mares and stallions, and the horses were placed in order of merit. During the period the system has gradually changed to what it is today, where horses are graded according to merit, being able to achieve the grade of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, accepted (mares) or licensed (stallions).

The evaluation system is a very important tool for reaching the breeding goals and for improving the breed. In an Evaluation the horses are evaluated according to a defined breed standard. Also in former days a stallion had to fulfil the quality-standards before being licensed, regardless if there were no licensed stallion in the actual district

The Organisations and Mandate

Since 1949 Norges Fjordhestlag (NFL) has been the main organisation for the Fjord Horse in Norway. Today NFL is recognised by the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture as the only breeding association for the Fjord Horse in Norway.

According to the European Convention for Livestock, Norway is, as the country of origin (mother country), responsible for the preservation and development of the Fjord Horse in Norway, the European Union and in those countries covered by the EFTA

Through the years the Fjord has been exported to many countries and the Fjord has been bred extensively abroad. For this reason NFL took the initiative to establish an international organisation so that all countries that are interested in the breed might be a part of and take part in an international breeding association for just this breed. Fjord Horse International, FHI for short, was formed as a company in 1997 and was changed to a membership association in 2001.



Rosendal Avlsgard 1922