

NORGE NEWS

Sunday 24 February 2019

Oslo, Norway

How do you spot a Norwegian?



Holmenkollen is the name of a hill, neighborhood and public ski park in northwestern Oslo, Norway's capital and largest city. It's where the world's most famous ski jump is located. From the top of that jump, above the fog that blankets the city, you're looking at Holmenkollen Chapel, a Lutheran Church where the royal family attends annual Christmas Eve services and near the royal lodge, where they live during Christmas. They also live there when they attend the annual Holmenkollen Ski Festival in March, this year the 8th-10th. Olav V, father of the current King Harald V and who reigned from 1957 to 1991, is buried at the lodge. He was a ski jumper here and also won a gold medal in sailing at the 1928 Amsterdam Summer Olympics.

This is the prow of the Oseberg Ship, the oldest Viking ship ever discovered and now one of three on display at the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo. Carbon dating puts its construction about the year 820. The details in the wood and its construction are important clues regarding the technological advancement of the people who built it and the fact that function does not fully explain the way they built things. In the year 834, this ship was taken out of service to be used as the burial ship for two Viking women. We don't know who they were, but we can infer they were important from the fact that such a valuable object should be the vessel to take them to the afterlife with elaborately carved sleighs, a wooden cart, five beds, 15 horses, six dogs and two cows. The women's skeletons and fragments of their woolen clothes were discovered with the ship in 1904 beneath a mound on the Oseberg farm in Vestfold County, Norway, on the west shore of Oslofjord. Most of what was found is on display in the museum along with two other Viking ships also used for burials of important people.



How do you spot a Norwegian?

Early in our trip to Norway, we had dinner in Bergen with friends at a downtown restaurant.

When we finished, we stepped outside into a pouring rain and I asked them how far away they lived.

“It’s just a 20-minute walk,” my Norwegian friend and fellow Tar Heel, Eli Nilsen, said.

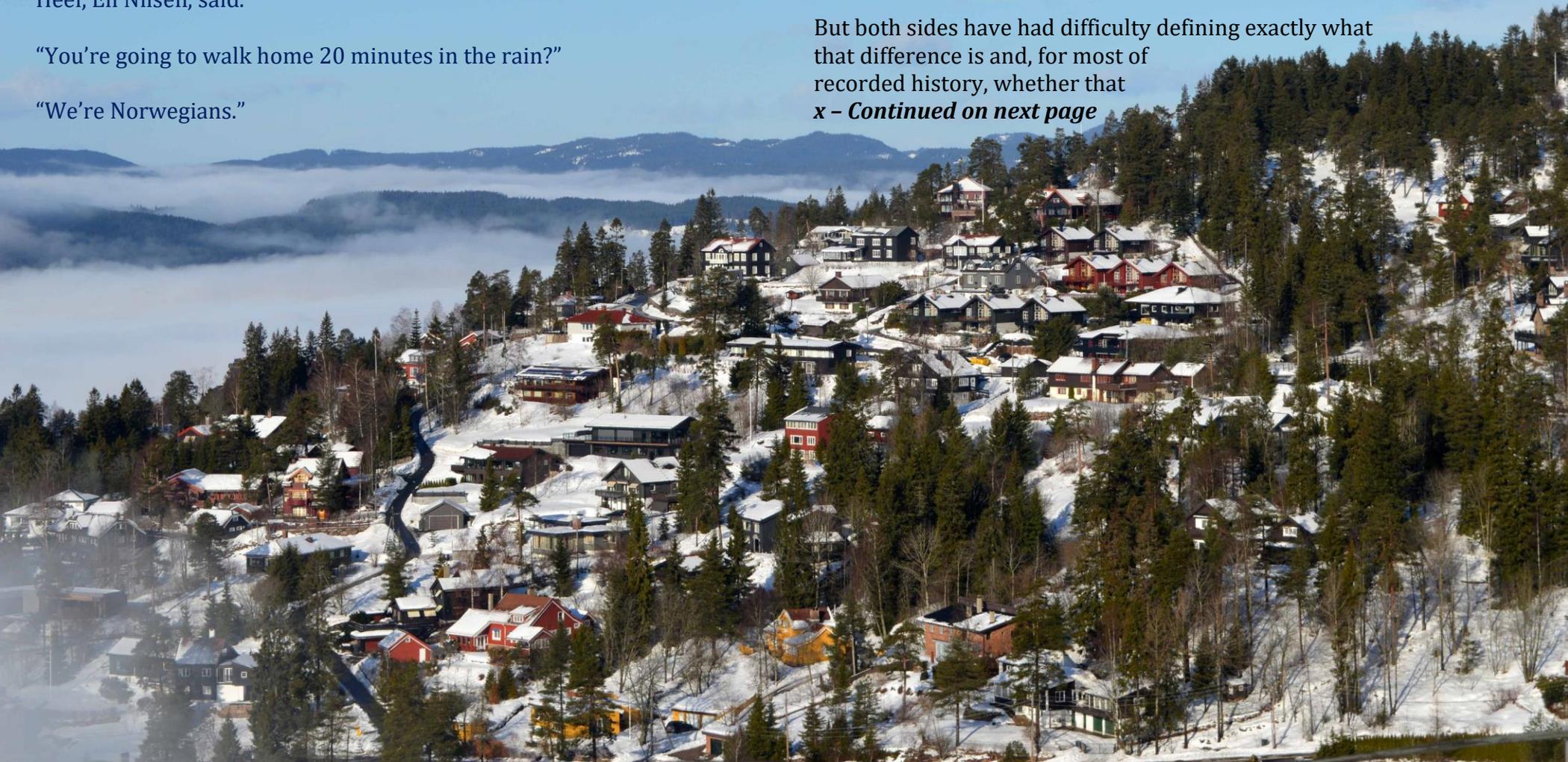
“You’re going to walk home 20 minutes in the rain?”

“We’re Norwegians.”

Which raises the question of who, exactly, are Norwegians, since Eli showed no outward signs of being a duck.

They are a group of people on this planet – about 5½ million total, fewer than live in the Bay Area or half the population of North Carolina – who have always felt themselves different from their Nordic neighbors and who have been regarded as such by those neighbors.

But both sides have had difficulty defining exactly what that difference is and, for most of recorded history, whether that
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A view from the back of the ski jump at the Holmenkollen neighborhood of Oslo, some of the priciest residential real estate in the nation.

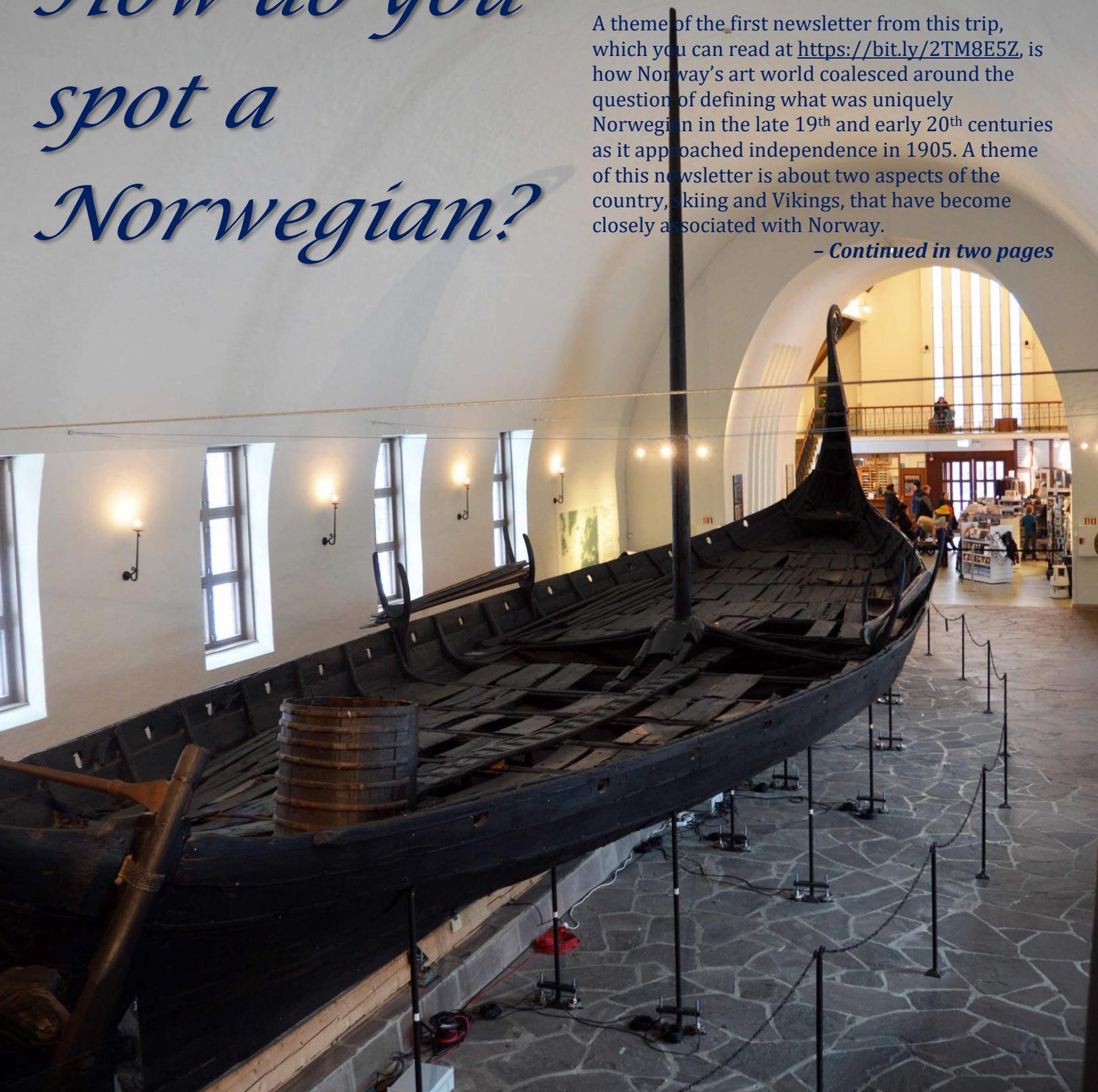
Here is a fuller view of the Oseberg ship. There are 15 oar locks, the row of holes along the upper edge of the hull, on each side, which means at least 30 crewmembers rowed the ship for propulsion in addition to the sail hung from the mast. So I tried to imagine 30-plus people in ships like this sailing west from Norway, hopscotching to the Shetland Islands of what is now Scotland, then several hundred more miles of open ocean to the Faroe Islands, another long stretch to Iceland, then to Greenland and finally to Labrador, in Canada, where artifacts that match those from Viking villages in Norway were found at L'Anse aux Meadows. They date to about 100 years after this ship was built and 500 years before Columbus. And then I remembered the four days recently that I sailed on this ocean in a diesel-driven steel ship of 500 people shielded from its wind, rain, snow, cold and waves while we walked the buffet line. And my imagination is inadequate.

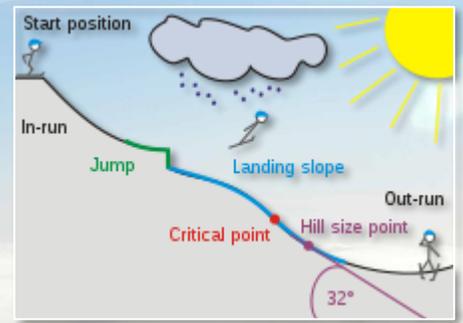
How do you spot a Norwegian?

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difference justified creation of a separate nation.

A theme of the first newsletter from this trip, which you can read at <https://bit.ly/2TM8E5Z>, is how Norway's art world coalesced around the question of defining what was uniquely Norwegian in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as it approached independence in 1905. A theme of this newsletter is about two aspects of the country, skiing and Vikings, that have become closely associated with Norway.

- Continued in two pages





Holmenkollen Ski Jump from near the jumper's starting point. That point is adjusted higher or lower according to snow and weather conditions to prevent jumpers from flying too far and landing dangerously on the flat out-run at the bottom rather than gently on the downhill sloping landing zone (see next page), which is designed to be nearly parallel with the jumper's flight path. If you were watching a World Cup competition from this spot, the jumper would ski down the in-run on the right and leap from the takeoff point, marked A. He – or she, these days – would soar out of sight over the edge of the landing hill, marked B, and land about 140 meters (460 feet, about 1½ American football fields) down the landing hill before it flattens into the out-run. The jumper would come back into view on the out-run in the fog marked C, which is surrounded by spectator seating. See the inset for a profile view. While this jumping tower was built in 2011, this hill has been used for ski jumping from a previous series of towers beginning in 1892, when the longest jump was 20 meters, or about 60 feet. Holmenkollen was the venue for most events in the 1952 Oslo Winter Olympics, when 140,000 spectators watched the jumping. Watch a one-minute YouTube about the ski jump at https://youtu.be/jspobqQWj_0.

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Before then, Norway had mostly been ruled either by the king of Denmark or Sweden.

My other Norwegian friend and fellow Tar Heel, Hanne Hovden, described the last change of ownership, in 1814, as “handing us to Sweden like a gift.”

Norway has worked to create a language separate from Danish and a unique national dress, the *bunad*, which is always appropriate to wear on the 17th of May, Constitution Day.

Two of my favorite stories that I did from the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Olympics also dealt with Norwegian identity, which you can read at <https://bit.ly/2PU04k7> and <https://bit.ly/2qCsYN6>.

But since 1967 it has become easier to tell the Norwegians from everyone else.

They one of only three countries with a per capita GDP of more than \$70,000 and average salaries to match.

Norwegians are the folks with the oil.



This is the landing zone, out of sight on the previous page, at Holmenkollen. Judges sit behind the windows on the far side. Spectators sit here and around the out-run, which is beyond the left edge of this picture.



The ski jump tower also houses the Ski Museum, which traces the history of skiing 4,000 years to its earliest evidence, carved stone, found in Norway. The word "ski" is a Norwegian word and probably the most widely used word from that language around the world. But – and this was my surprise of the trip – it is pronounced like the English word "she." In the absence of contrary evidence, my guess is because "she" sounds like the hissing sound skis make passing over snow. This painting in the museum is of Torstein Skjelva and Skjervald Skrukka, who carried future King Håkon IV, then 2 years old, to safety from Lillehammer to Trondheim during the Norwegian civil war in 1206. Their lower legs are wrapped in birch bark, from which they and the king's supporters came to be known as Birkebeiners. Since 1932, this rescue has been commemorated by the annual Birkebeinerrennet, a 50 kilometer (about 31 miles) cross-country ski race between Lillehammer and Rena. The race is limited to 16,000 participants, each of whom must carry a backpack weighing at least 3.5 kilograms (about 8 pounds) symbolizing the weight of the future king. Beginning in 1973, the American Birkebeiner, which draws more than 10,000 skiers, has been held over a 50 km course between Cable and Hayward, Wisconsin. Skiers there also carry the backpacks, which in both cases are used to carry food and emergency gear for the race.



My friends Eirik, the scuba diver, and Hanne, the soccer player, with an empty bottle of American wine after our fantastic lunch in Oslo.

Fun with Flags

This is not a coincidence (countries named first in their own language)

Nordic
Countries

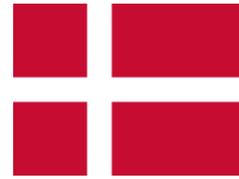
Danmark (Denmark)

Capital: København (Copenhagen)

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Population: 5.7 million

Language: Danish, a Germanic language



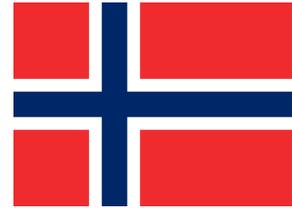
Norge (Norway)

Capital: Oslo

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Population: 5.3 million

Language: Two versions of Norwegian, a Germanic language: Bokmål (book language), spoken by about 85% of population, and Nynorsk (new Norwegian), spoken by 12%.



Sverige (Sweden)

Capital: Stockholm

Government: Constitutional monarchy

Population: 10.1 million

Language: Swedish, a Germanic language



Suomi (Finland)

Capital: Helsinki

Government: Republic

Population: 5.5 million

Language: Finnish, a Uralic language, setting Finland apart from Scandinavia, and Swedish



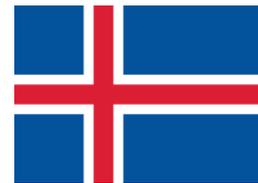
Island (Iceland)

Capital: Reykjavik

Government: Republic

Population: 351,000

Language: Icelandic



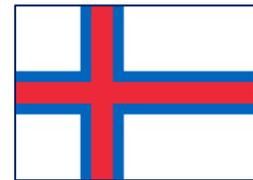
Føroyar (Faroe Islands)

Capital: Torshavn

Government: Devolved government within Denmark

Population: 51,000

Language: Faroese, Danish



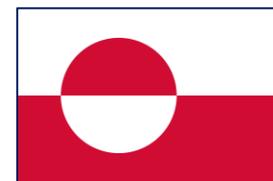
Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland)

Capital: Nuuk

Government: Devolved government within Denmark

Population: 56,000

Language: Greenlandic, Danish



Scandinavian
Countries

Scottish Flags
Honoring
Norse Heritage



Shetland



Orkney



Caithness

