

# *LIFE BY THE RAPIDS*

## *EDUARD BECHTELER IN NÄSÅKER*



Nämforsen in Ådals-Lidens parish has given a powerful impression to people for over thousands of years. Ever since the nineteenth century artists have shown it in paintings. During 1890-94 the artist and author Pelle Molin settled in Näsåker. We may suppose that he wanted to be within close proximity to the rapids.



*Pelle Molin, Nämforsen*

During the 1940's and -50's many artists came to paint Nämforsen before it was changed into a power station. Among them were Hugo Zuhr, Sven X:et Erixson, Axel Birkholm, Albin Amelin, Hampe Svanberg and Rulle Abrahamsson.



*Sven X:et Erixson, Nämforsen*

In the summer of 1932 newly married couple Eduard Bechteler and Ruth Zachrisson-Bechteler, both artists, were on a trip up to Lappland. They were both so overcome by the view over Näsåker Valley and the rapids that they built their own castle like house named Villa Edelweiss right on the edge of the deep silty riverbank.



*Villa Edelweiss: Photo:  
unknown*

Through a big perspective window in the villa they could take in the view over the rapids area like a cinema screen with constantly changing images. Living and being surrounded by the rapids meant that they could take in an array of sounds and images ranging from fishermen, rafters, cascading rapids, jumping salmon and heavily falling logs.



*Eduard Bechteler, Nämforsen  
(detail)*

In reality the most dramatic paintings were of working fishermen and rafters. One false move or mistake from the workers in the river could result in serious injury or even death.



*Eduard Bechteler, Three  
rafters*

In the 1940's Nämforsen as a free flowing river disappeared due to the establishment of the Nämforsen power plant. Mr Bechteler's most important motifs were gone and in 1957 he tried to obtain 50,000 crowns worth of compensation from Vattenfall for the interference of the power plant within the artistic area – but in vain. Later other beautiful artistic sceneries also disappeared when also the rapids of Kilforsen, Åkvisslan and Holaforsen were exploited.



*Eduard Bechteler,  
Snaring salmons (detail)*

*“Eduard Bechteler is showing life ‘at the edge of the river’, the life that now is redefined by constructors of power plants and river regulators. Besides the artistic value of his paintings, they shall always be a treasure as a document for coming generations, when they try to grasp how life looked like when our rivers were flowing wild and untamed.” (Lars E. Frånberg, Västernorrlands Allehanda Newspaper November 21, 1955.)*

*ART EXHIBITION 31/05/08 – 30/08/08*



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