



## The Benevolent Yule Goat

**Along with reindeer, think yule goat at the holidays; it's been part of Scandinavian mid-winter celebrations for more than 1,000 years.**

Courtesy Barbro Paulsson/ Wikipedia

If you think of Christmas and think of reindeer, think again. Think of the yule goat.

Call him the julbock (Sweden), julebukk (Norway), or joulupuuki (Finland), he's been part of Scandinavian mid-winter celebrations for more than one thousand years.

In ancient midwinter celebrations a human dressed in goatskins and wearing a mask portrayed the Norse thunder god Thor's goats, Tanngrisnir (Gap-tooth) and Tanngnjóstr (Tooth-grinder), who pulled his chariot through the winter sky.

In a traveling play called the "Juleoffer," the man-goat "died" and came back to life, just as the winter sun does at Yule.

Early Christian fathers frowned on pagan revelry, so they proclaimed the Yule goat a demon.

According to 17th-century Swedish records, this darker version of the Yule goat traveled the countryside demanding food, playing pranks, and frightening people on the night of December 25.

He eventually become a benevolent being, giving gifts instead of demanding them.

Still later, instead of giving presents he worked for those who brought them. Gnome-like, gift-giving Swedish tomten, Norwegian nissen, and Finnish tonttu all rode Yule goats or hitched them to their sleds.

Early twentieth century Scandinavian artists like Jenny Nyström popularized the Yule goat and his tomten handlers through hundreds of charming, antique Christmas cards you can still buy at eBay today.

Here are several more ways to add the spirit of the Yule goat to your Christmas festivities this year. Buy or make a straw julbock. The tradition dates back hundred of years, when families saved wheat sheaves until Christmas, then used them to create a goat effigy tied with red ribbons. Scandinavian gift stores sell them, as do eBay sellers this time of year.

Pack up your kids and "go julebukk", a Norwegian custom whereby children dress in costume (goat, gnome, and Christmas elf costumes are especially appropriate) and appear on the doorsteps of family friends, where they sing Christmas carols in exchange for small treats.

Keep watch (online) over the Gävle goat, a giant version of a traditional straw julbock erected in central Gävle, Sweden, every year Vandals destroyed 38 the 66 goats constructed since 1966.

Will this year's survive? Tune in to the Gävle goat Webcams at Christmas Goat Sweden or official Gävle, Sweden, websites and see.

About the Author: Sue Weaver is a hobby farmer, avid history lover and Hobby Farms contributing editor.