

# Why the Vikings are coming, again

**By A Scotland Correspondent**

SCOTLAND is bracing itself for another Viking invasion as Scandinavians arrive in record numbers in search of treasure.

Thousands of Swedes, Norwegians and Danes are following in their ancestors' footsteps to plunder gold from burns deep in the Lowther Hills, Dumfriesshire. Around 12,000 people visited the Museum of Lead Mining in Wanlockhead last year to pan for nuggets and this year it expects 15,000, around a quarter from Scandinavia.

Brian Montgomery, panning expert and museum manager, said that the surge in arrivals had surprised local prospectors. "They have come here to raid and pillage again. There have been a really large number of Scandinavian visitors and a steady stream of Northern

Europeans," he said. "The main reason is the cheaper air fares and the ferries that are coming into Rothesay."

The Lowther Hills have a long history of producing pure gold. In 2001 a Swedish panner found a record six-gram nugget. The Scottish Crown and Mace are made from gold found in the area as is the Scottish Parliament mace. Priced at £35 a gram, the gold is such a valuable commodity that the museum receives countless e-mails from brides and grooms seeking a unique wedding ring.

Mr Montgomery said not all visitors to Wanlockhead, which hosts the national gold panning championships next month, were experienced prospectors. "There was a Scandinavian couple who visited us on their version of *Blind Date*," he said. "She was even in the burn panning for gold in a bikini."

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