

European
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NORWEGIAN INDUSTRIAL WORKERS MUSEUM WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Seldom are nature and technology located so unexpectedly near to one another. A waterfall thunders into the depths right next to the old hydroelectric power station built in 1911, with which the Norsk Hydro company catapulted the rural parish of Rjukan into the industrial era. There is nothing to indicate that between 1942 and

1944 this location right beneath the Hardanger plateau played a central role in strategic military planning. For this is where Nazi Germany was manufacturing heavy water for its atom bomb research, something which the allies were trying to prevent by means of daring sabotage action. The dramatic episode is part of the exhibition that can be currently seen in the power station, which has now been transformed into a museum. Thanks to ten still existing Pelton turbines the power station was the largest of its type in the world when it was completed. The museum documents the huge changes that happened as a result. It is centred on the people who worked here, their everyday life and their trades union activities - and finally also to the radical change caused by the closure of the works in 1971.

**Norwegian
Industrial
Workers
Museum World
Heritage Site**

Norsk

Industriarbeidermuseu

Vemork

3661 Rjukan

Norway

+47 (0) 35 -

099000

[Homepage](#)

(<http://nia.no/vemork>)



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History

On 27th February 1943 Norwegian resistance fighters blew up the heavy water plant at the Norsk-Hydro Works near Rjukan. This act of sabotage hit the only industrial plant under German control that was capable of producing heavy water (deuterium oxide, D2O) in significant quantities. The team of German atomic physicists around Otto Hahn needed this water in order to drive an experimental reactor for making plutonium for military use. The allies were committed to prevent this. Suddenly Rjukan was a place where the world held its breath. That it all came to this was due to a Norwegian engineer and entrepreneur by the name of Sam Eyde. Between 1907 and 1911 he had a powerful hydroelectric power station constructed by his company, Norsk Hydro, in Vemork near Rjukan. At the heart of the power station was an engine house, initially equipped with **ten 14,500 horsepower turbines built by the German engineering company Voith** in Heidenheim and the **Zürich firm A/G Escher Wyss**. The main building, built in concrete with a granite facade, was constructed from designs by Olaf Nordhagen. In its early years the hydroelectric station served as a source of power for making saltpetre. From 1929 onwards it helped to generate hydrogen gas by electrolysis - a process which creates heavy water as a by-product. Up until then the region had been entirely rural but now it was thrown abruptly into the industrial era. The model town of Rjukan sprang up from the earth, bringing with it a comparatively high standard of living. Electricity arrived and educational facilities were improved. Trades Unions gained a foothold. New technologies for generating hydrogen gas led to the closure of the Norsk-Hydro-Works in 1971, with a loss of around 1,500 jobs. One of the ways in which the region tried to give the local inhabitants new opportunities was to redevelop the power station into a museum of work. This was opened in 1988.



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