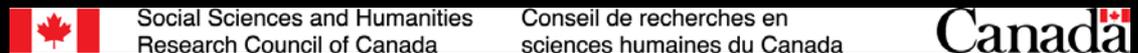


The Archaeology of Settlement and Abandonment of Svalbarð : Initial results of an archaeological transect across a community in northeast Iceland

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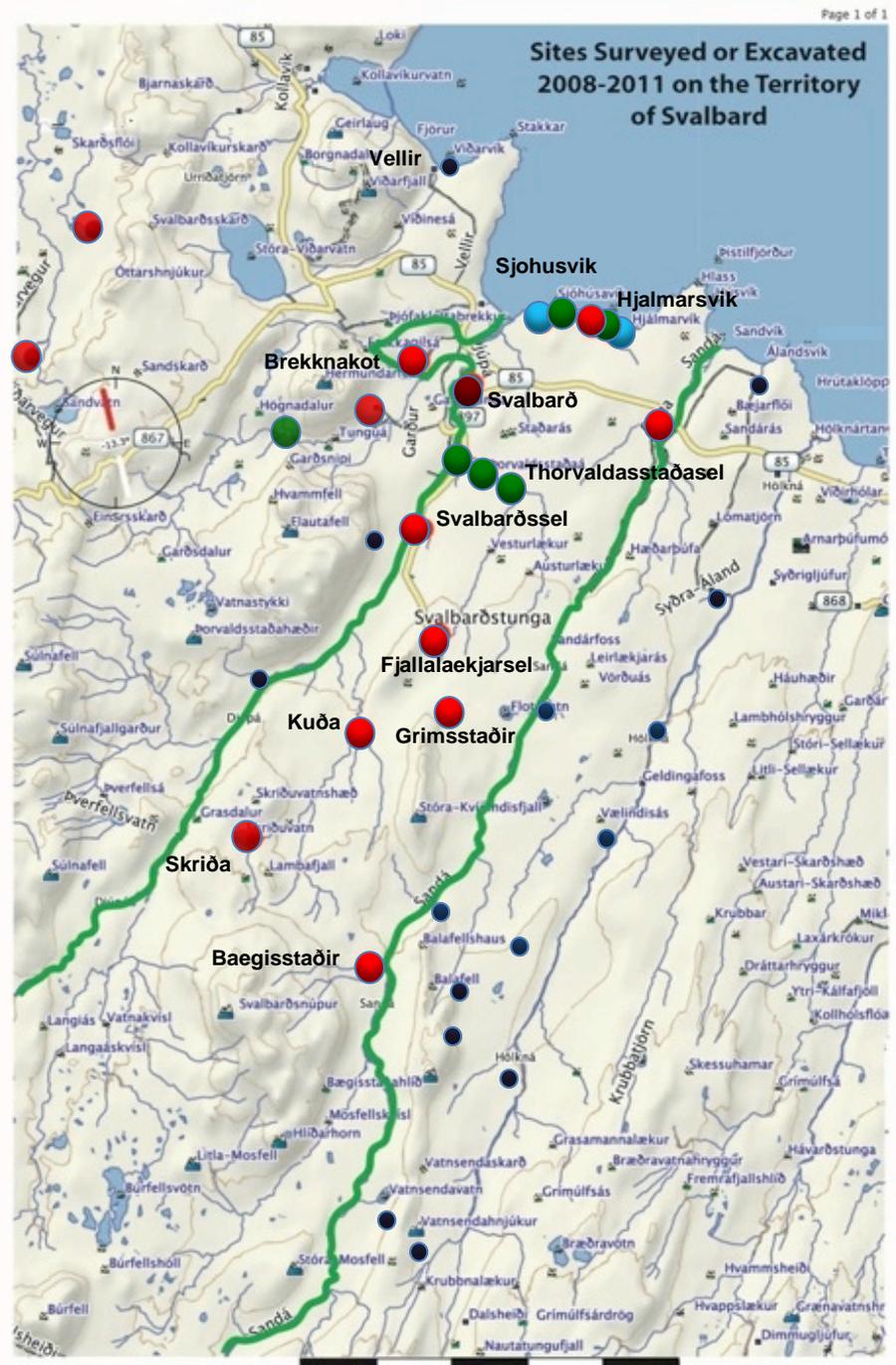


Project Objectives

- Reconstruction of dynamic histories of landscape change, settlement and economic practice in a well-defined community in the *longue durée*
- Test current models of Icelandic settlement history using a unique data set representing the complete history of a single estate
- Examine institutions and practices lending resilience to a community in a marginal and peripheral socio-ecological context over 1000 years
- Complete archaeological inventory of the estate territory, site chronologies, sampling and excavation of key sites, regional-level palaeoenvironmental studies

Preliminary Results Sites on the Territory of the Svalbarð estate Settlement Surveys Surveyed or Excavated 2008-2012

- 18 site complexes, over 120 individual surveyed sites
- Permanent and relatively dense occupation of the coastal zone (<10km of coast)
- Episodic and relatively dispersed occupation of the interior (>10km of coast)
- 14th to 17th century permanent farms and shielings in the coastal zone
- The interior zone was occupied between circa. 1300 and 1477, and then abandoned until the 18th century. A climate change impact?
- For the most part, permanent farming operations in the interior do not seem to have ever been sustained



Hjálmarvík

a substantial coastal farm converted to a *kot*



Sjóhúsvík: a fishing site



...and a tiny small coastal farming site

Þorvaldsstaðasel shieling

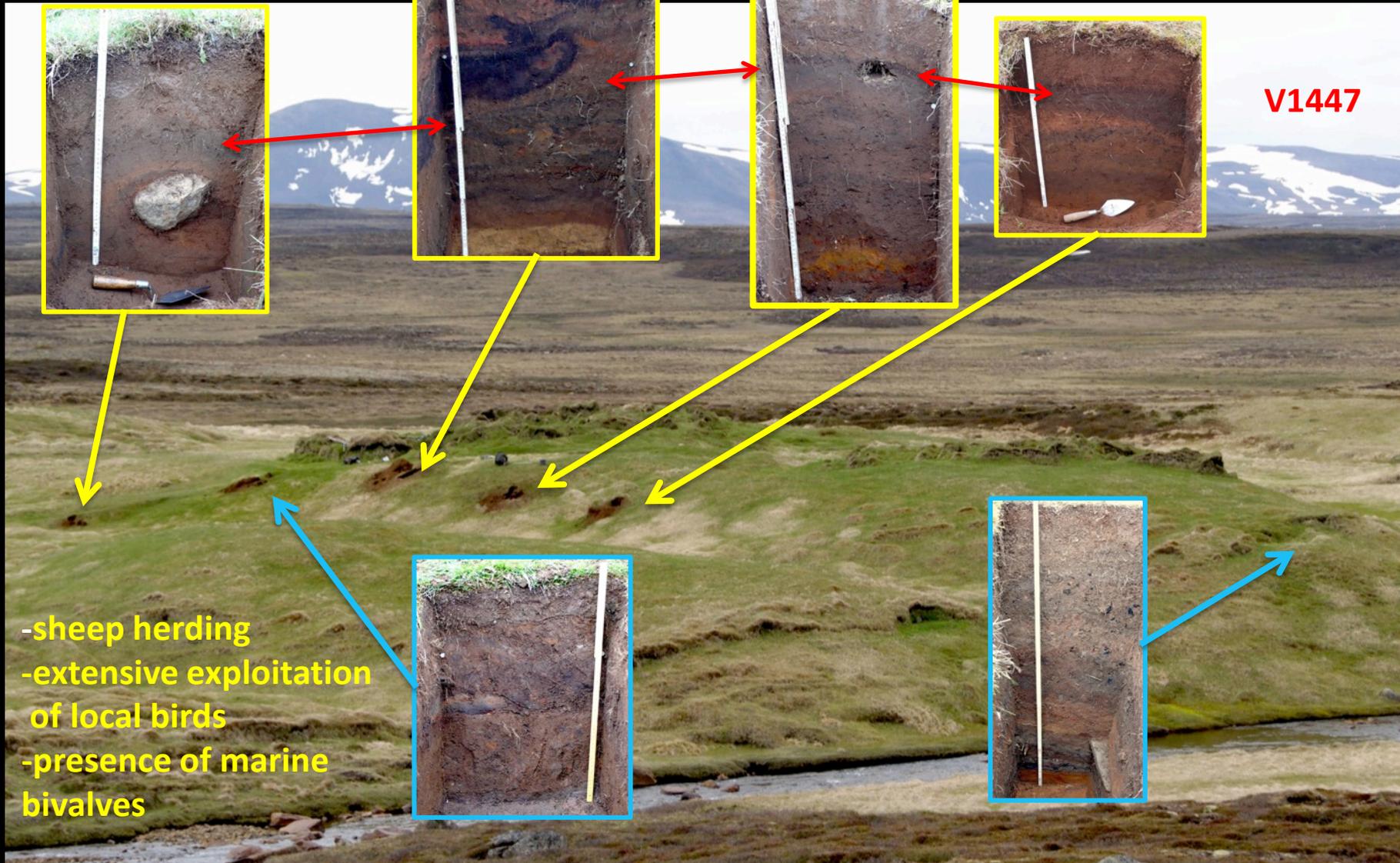




Kúđá

-occupations from before 1300, ongoing until 1960's

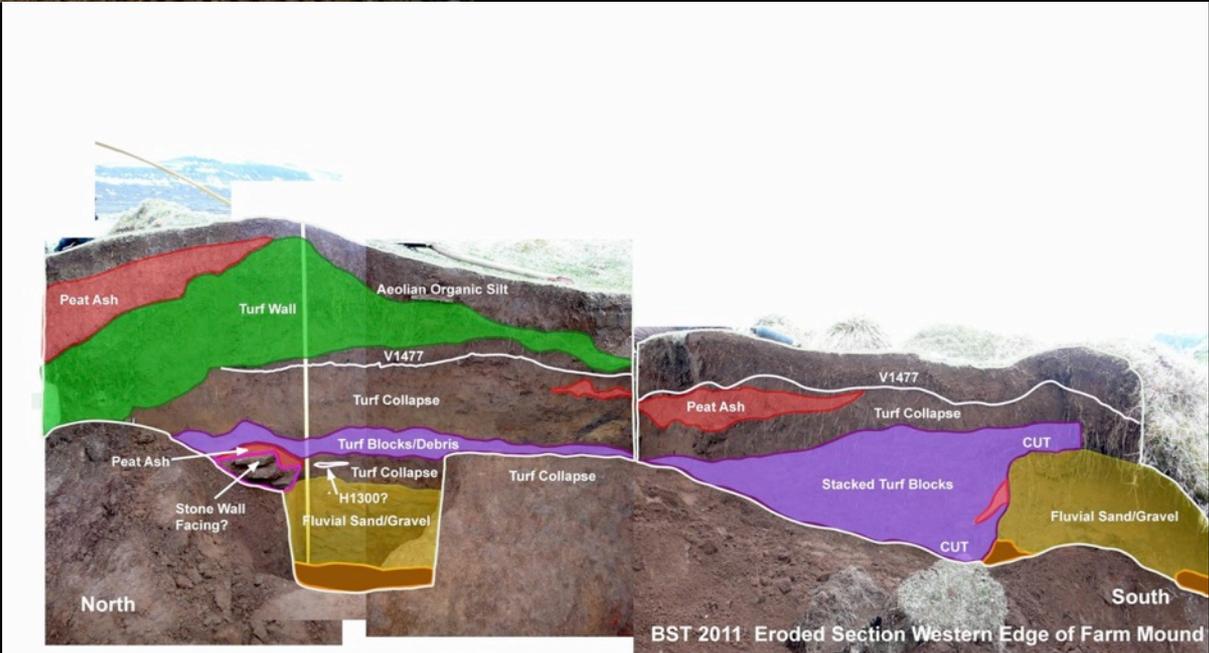




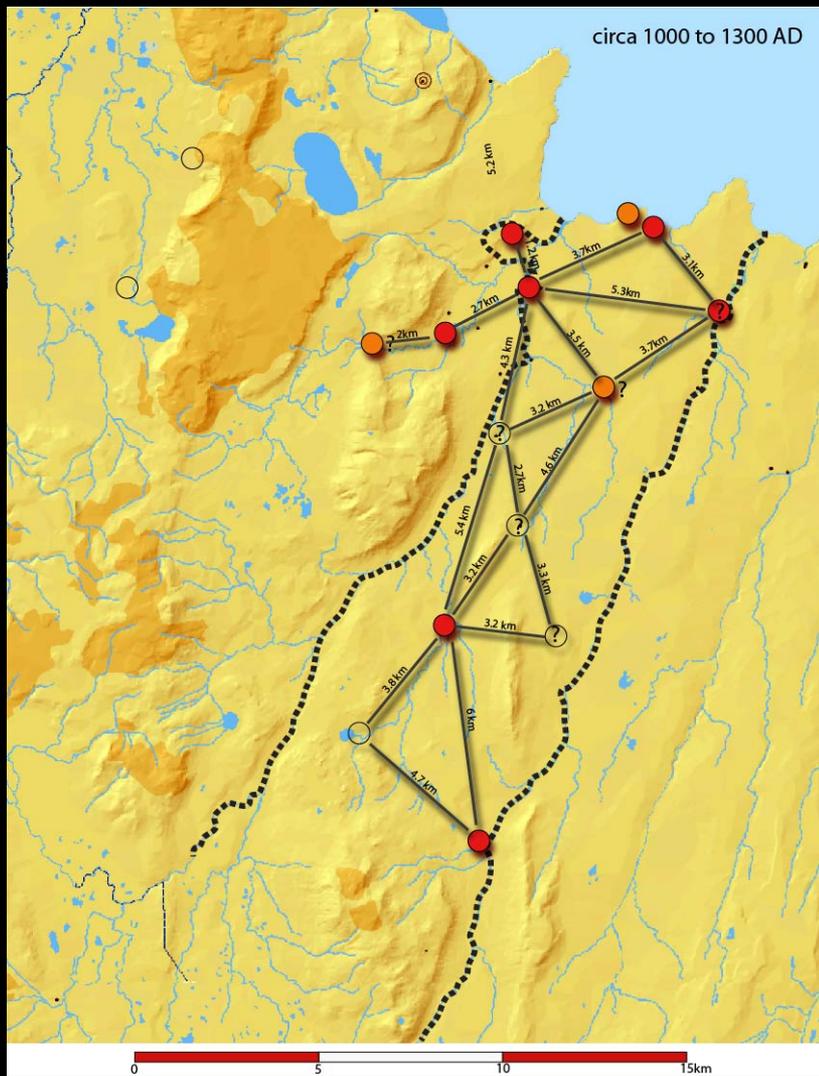
V1447

- sheep herding
- extensive exploitation of local birds
- presence of marine bivalves

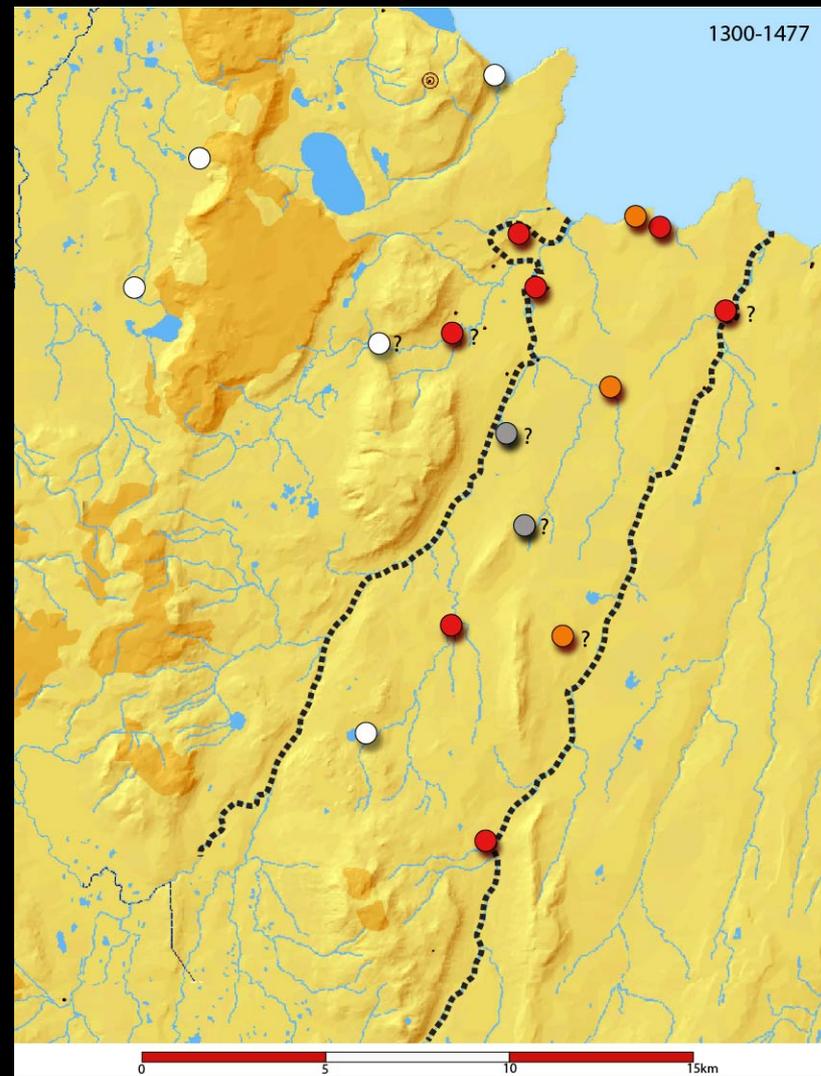
Baegisstaðir



1000-1300

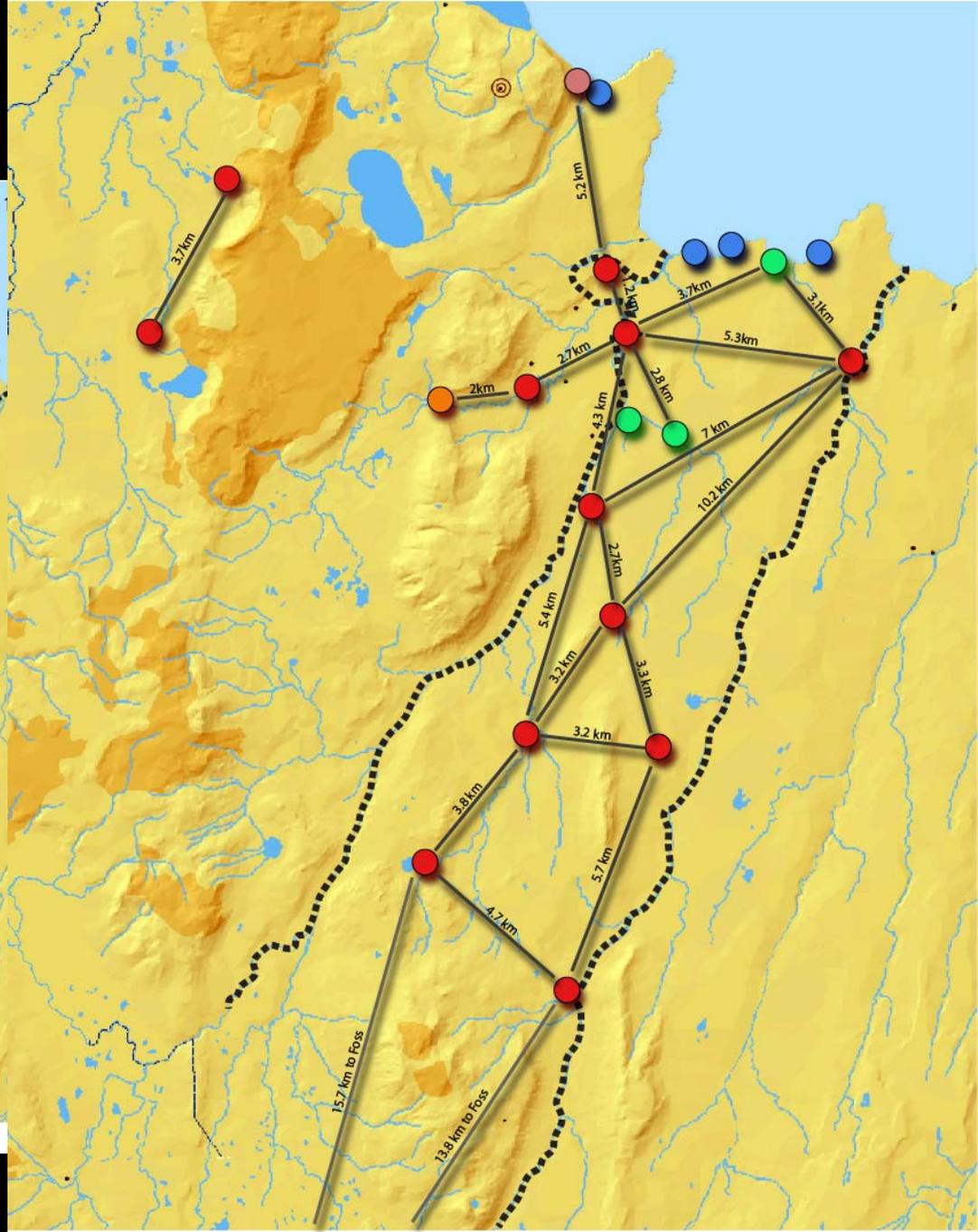
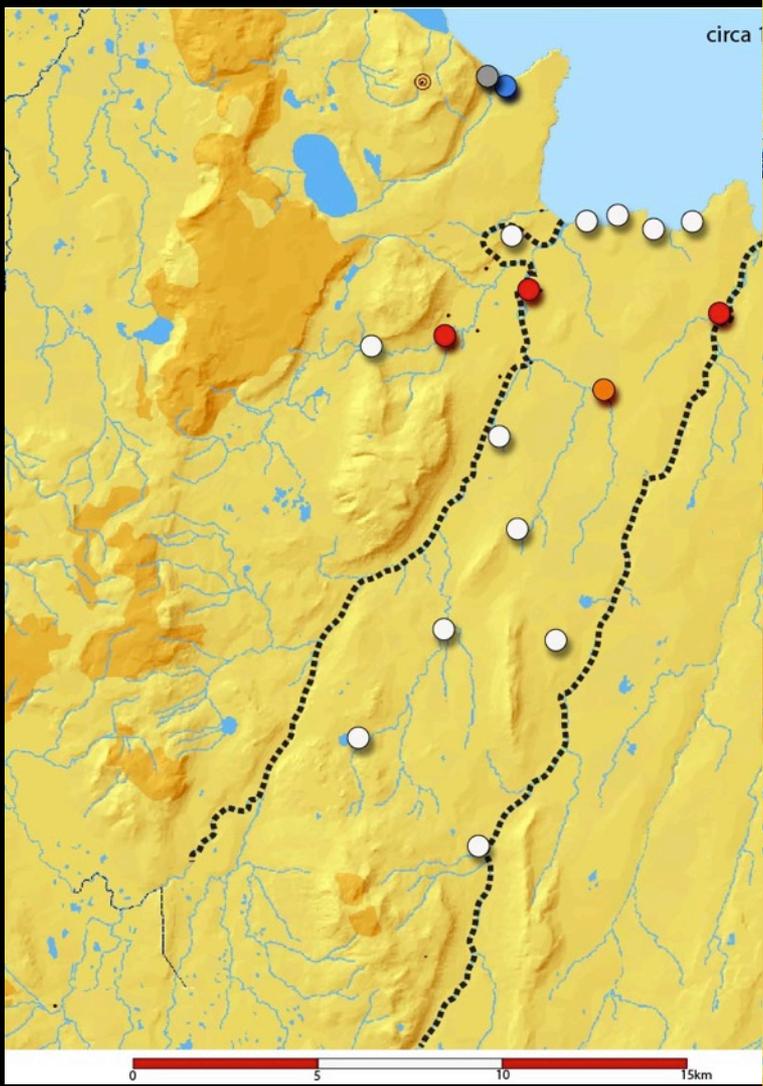


1300-1477

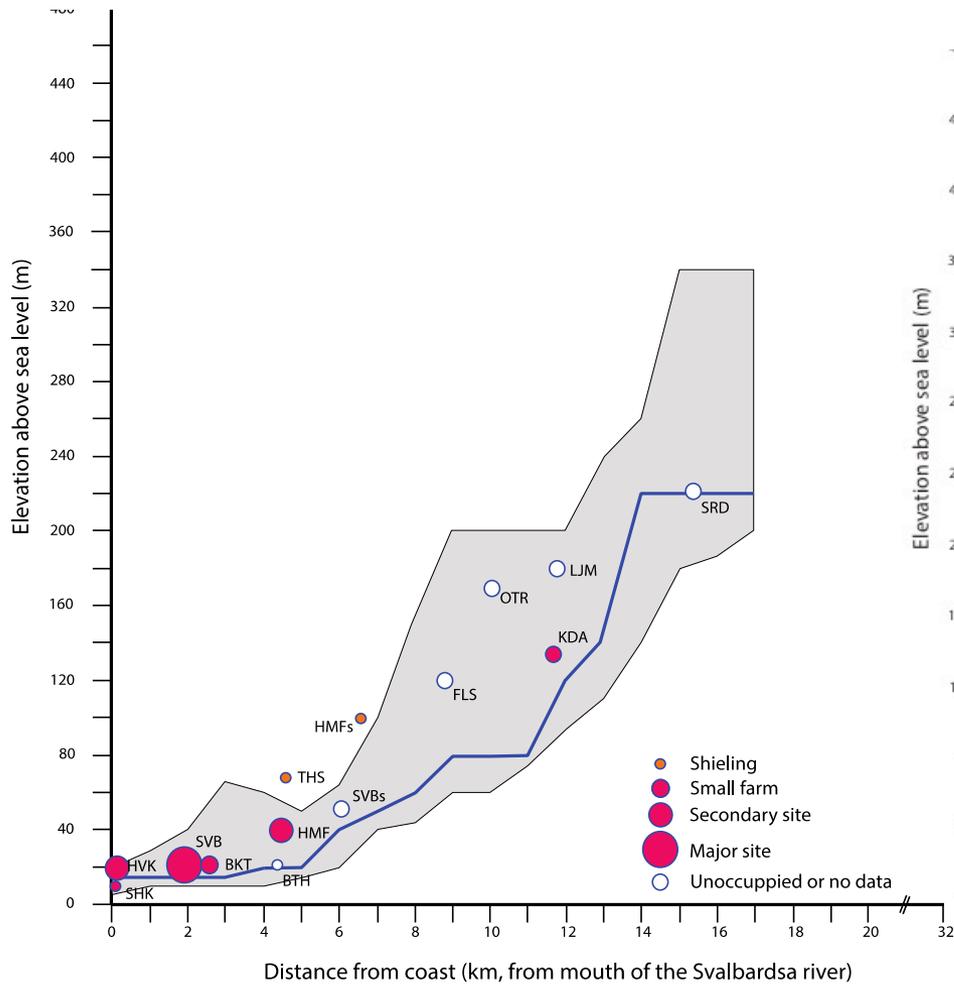


1477-1712

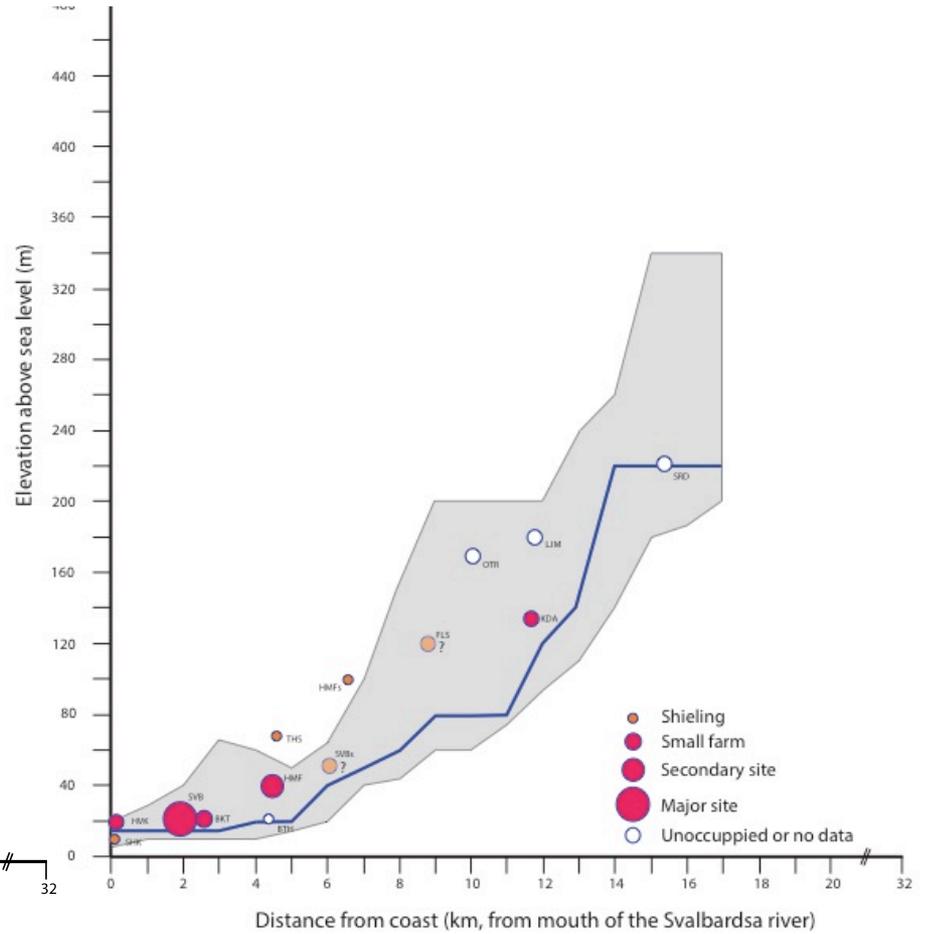
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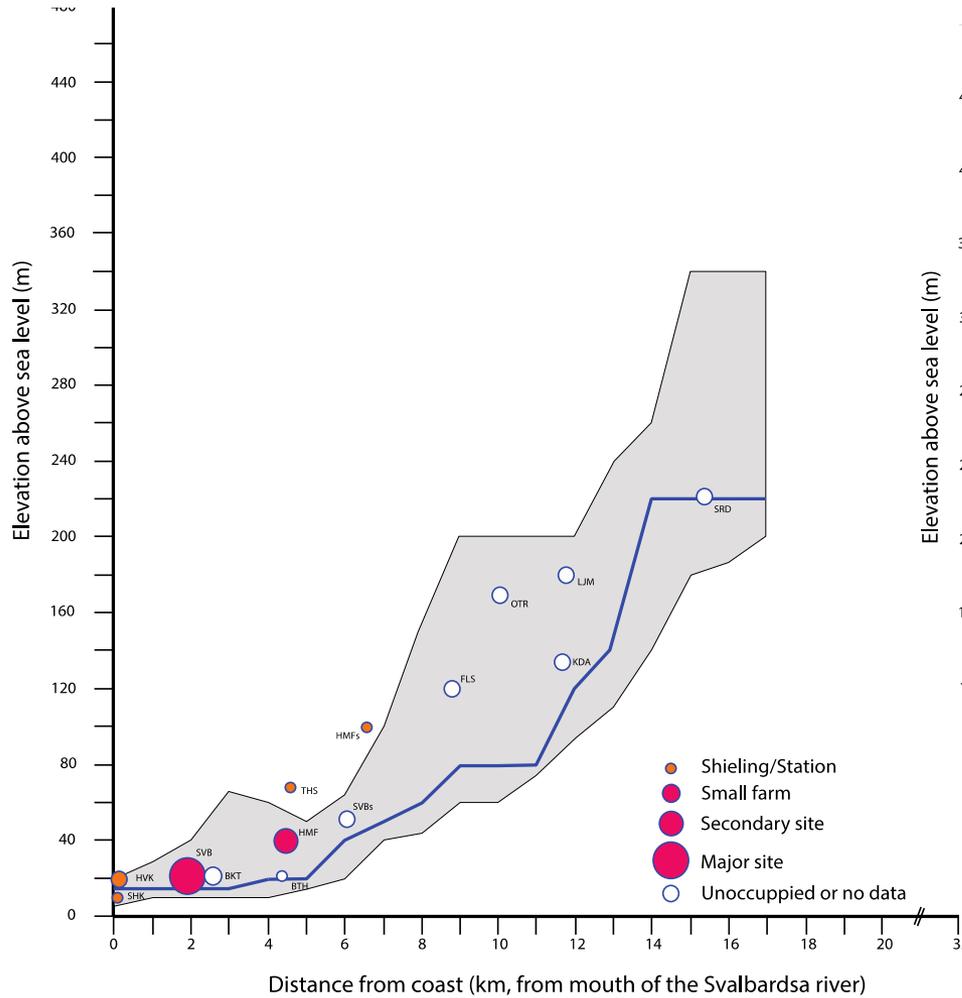
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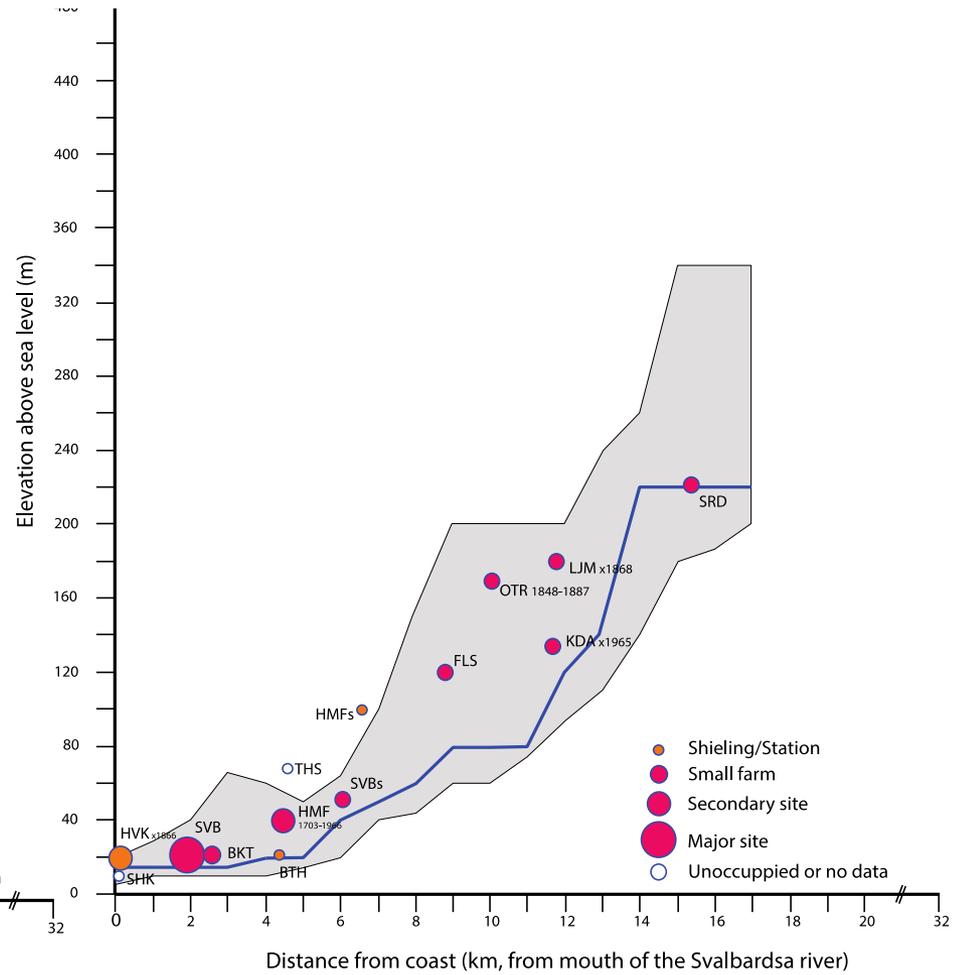
1300-1477



1477-1712



1713-1960



Cross Cutting Circumstances & Conjonctures

- Colonisation and abandonment events on the Svalbarð estate tend to happen in waves, not isolated idiosyncratic events
- Mass abandonments of the 15th century and thereafter surely related to climatic change, epidemics
- Local socio-political negotiations, economics and life histories of households are involved as well

cases: -enclosure of Hjálmarvík , the “Hjálmarvik-isation » of Svalbarð. Economic resilience and intensified wool

-Fjallalækjarsel as the winning interior nýbýlig farm



Hjálmarvík Midden 2012

-House floor and extensive midden deposits identified by soil coring in 2009

-Sampled in 2009-2011 for chronology, zooarchaeology, archaeoentomology and geoarchaeology, house tested

-Large-scale excavation (12m²) in 2012

-Bulk of deposit capped by H1300 and V1477 tephras, initial deposition in 11th century

The extent and density of midden deposits and extraordinary finds suggest a substantial and sustained occupation by people of means:

A middle or high rank farm ?



Hjálmarvík

Preliminary Faunal Analysis

A mixed economy in use at the elite central farm of Svalbarð from landnam to AD 1400; focus on dairying and sheep herding after circa. 1250, supplemented importantly by diverse marine resources (esp. fish and seals)

-At both sites, an extremely high seal NISP in comparison to other Icelandic farms

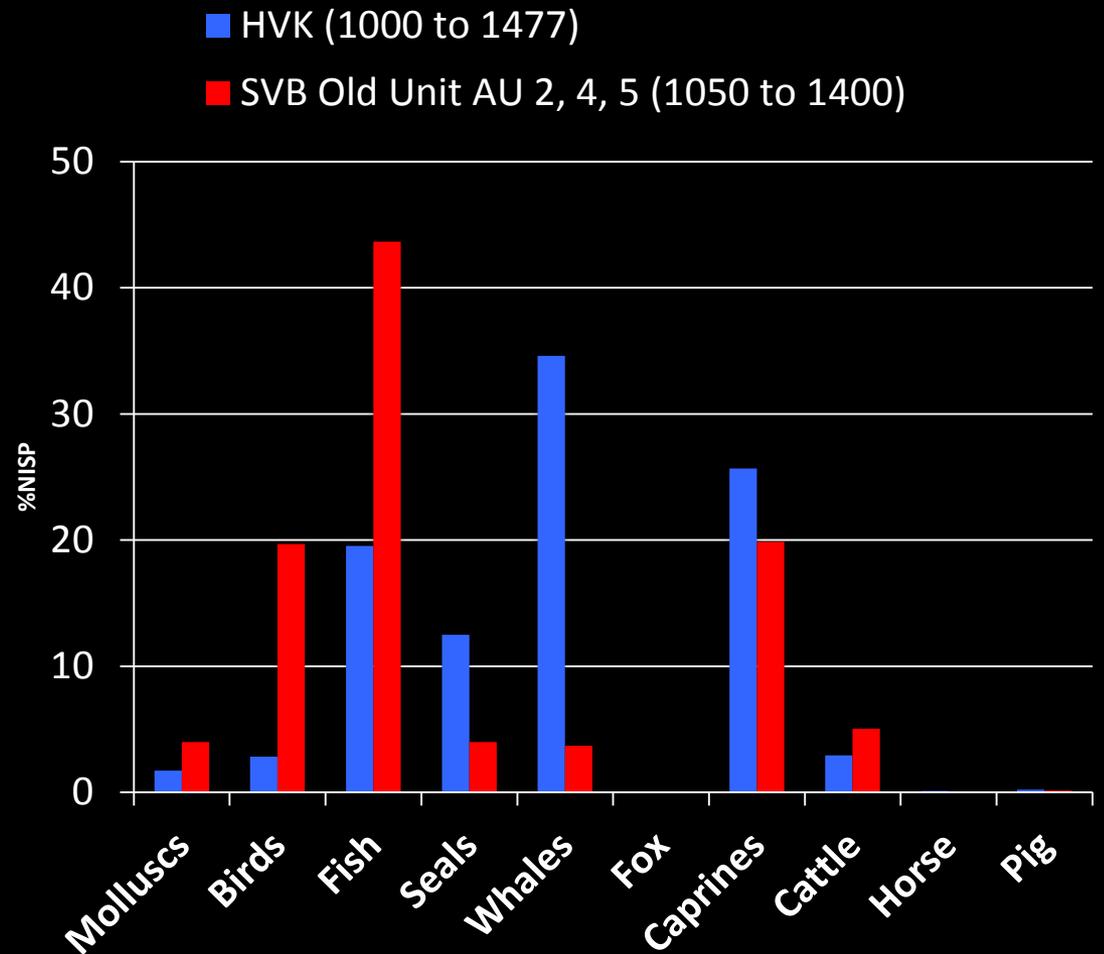
At Hjálmarvík, a mixed economy focussed on sheep herding and marine resources is clearly demonstrated

-Whales are exploited at both farms. Small bone fragments indicative of processing or bone working activity are especially frequent at HVK

-the growth of sheep herding at SVB and HVK is paralleled by the establishment of herding stations in the coastal zone at and after circa. 1300

Taxonomic Abundance (%NISP) in Faunal Assemblages from the Svalbarð Estate

(data from Dupont-Hébert 2012, Amorosi 1996)



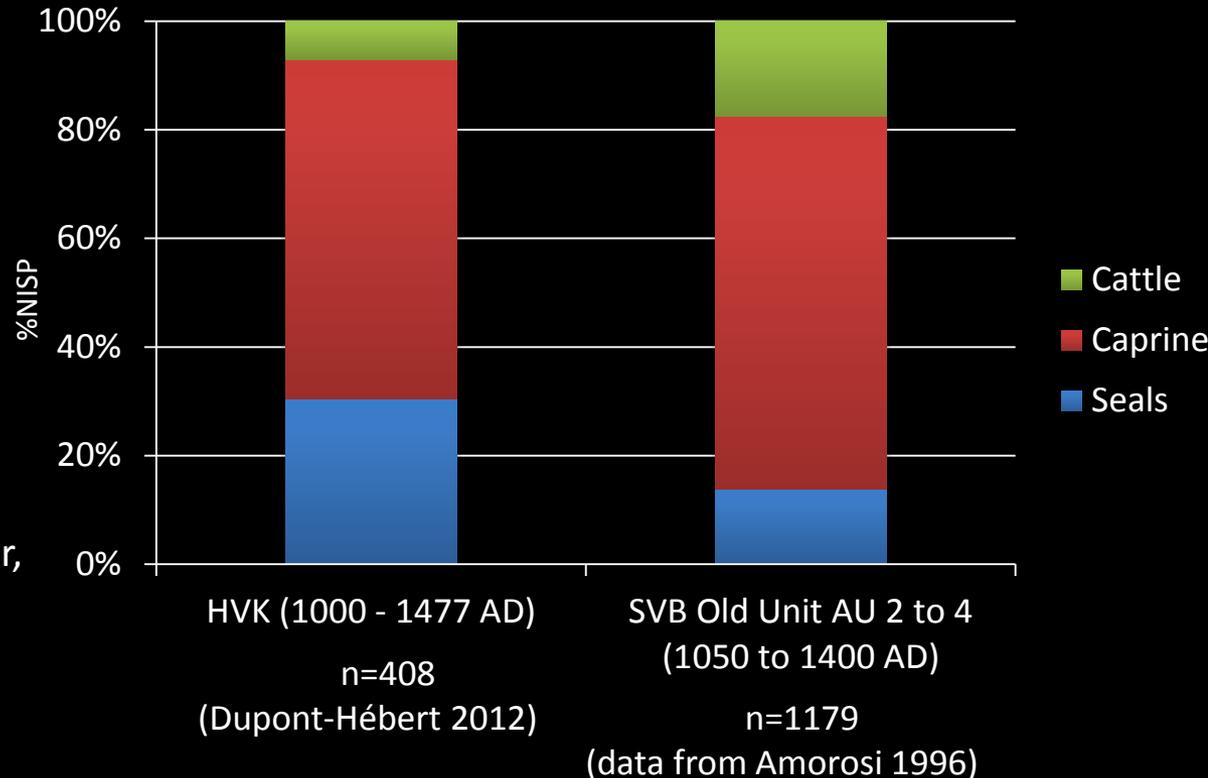
-Seals are even more important at Hjalmarvik than at Svalbarð, comprising 30% of the major Mammal taxa faunal assemblage

-The resilience of the SVB and HVK farm sites (in terms of their dense and sustained occupation) appears directly related to their diversified resource base and capacity to secure food sources from the marine ecosystem

-While some of the best grazing lands on the Svalbarð estate are in the interior, farms without direct access to marine resources do not appear to have been sustainable

-Hjalmarvik's abandonment is due to the legal enclosure of a viable farm and its annexation to the church farm, probably *because* of its sustainability rather than its non-viability

Major Mammal Taxa in Svalbarð Estate Assemblages (%NISP)



Kuðá turf structure ruin

- multiple small ash deposits on floor (hearths?)
- turf wall overlies more extensive peat ash deposits
- V1477 overlies the wall, H1300 in wall turf
- ma uch more modest occupation than the modern farm



Svalbard Extension Unit North Section

