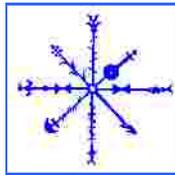


Midden Investigations at Saltvík N Iceland  
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NORSEC  
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**Summary:** This report presents the results of a first stage investigation of possible midden deposits at the site of Saltvík near Husavik in N Iceland carried out August 12<sup>th</sup> 2003. An Oakfield tube-type soil corer was used to probe possible midden deposits around five structures associated with what appears to be three concentration of structures (NW, W, and NE) on the hillside and stream gullies to the S of the modern farm and horse stable area of Saltvík. These structural complexes are on either side of the two pre-christian burials higher up on the hillside. The site survey data, measured plans and all excavation data for the structures and burials was collected by FSI (Archaeological Institute Iceland) teams and is reported separately. Coring around the NW and NE structural complexes indicated fairly thin and discontinuous deposits, except directly to the south of the possible pit house where up to 25 cm of cultural deposit (bone flecks, charcoal, burnt bone and mottled ash) suggest a potential deposit. The area around both the long rectangular possible hall structures in the NW and NE complexes were also heavily covered with thufur hummoc (up to 50 -75 cm deep) which will have severely disrupted any archaeological stratigraphy in these areas. However, conditions were different around the W complex (a potential pit house, long hall, and several apparent outbuildings) and what may be a substantial intact cultural deposit extends downslope west) of the hall ruin. This area produced 25-30 cm of cultural deposit, including burnt bone, charcoal, ash, and some apparent stratification.

**Recommendation:** Test units should be placed outside the long hall structure in the W complex and to the S of the pit house in the NW complex to better determine the nature and extent of these cultural deposits and to test organic preservation.

**Discussion and Description:** The midden team (represented by Tom McGovern) visited Saltvík Aug 12<sup>th</sup> and carried out a first stage coring around the structures already mapped and test trenched by the FSI structures and survey teams. The three complexes of structures were designated by reference to the two human burials on the ridge to the S of the modern farm and horse barn, and were denoted as complexes NW, W, and NE respectively. Coring around the major structures in these complexes using an Oakfield soil corer and recording each core on a sketch map (see figures and original MS drawings in site archive)

**NW:** The NW complex was aligned along the edge of a now dry stream cut that extends from the now fairly eroded upland down towards the bay of Saltvík approximately 2 km to the N. (figure 1). The first structure investigated (informally designated **NW 1**) was an apparent pit house (sunken feature structure) that had already been tested by FSI structures team. Three cores were placed around this structure:

**NW 1 core 1**, ca 3 m E (upslope) of the structure, at the base of thufur.

- 0-10 cm : rootlets and turf
- 10-15 cm: yellow brown silt with some probable H3 upcast fragments
- 15-50 cm: sterile yellow brown silt

**NW 1 core 2**, ca 2 m to the W (downslope) of the structure

- 0-10 cm: rootlets and turf
- 10-15 cm: mottled brown with some flecks of H3 upcast
- 15-50 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 50 cm: rock

**NW 1 core 3**, ca 1 m from the S wall center

- 0-15 cm: rootlets and turf
- 15-20 cm: mottled dk and lt brown silt
- 20-40 cm: mottled silt and ash, bone flecks, burnt bone, charcoal
- 40-55 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 55-60 cm: H3 in situ
- 60-65 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 65 cm: rock

The large rectilinear structure (hall?) just to the N of the pit house NW 1 had heavy thufur development to the E side (upslope) and only somewhat more moderate development to the W side (downslope). Five cores were taken around this structure (informally designated NW 2):

**NW2 core 1**, ca 2 m W from apparent "door" near NW corner of long hall.

- 0-10 cm: rootlets and turf
- 10-35 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 35 cm: stone

**NW 2 core 2**, ca 2 m W from apparent mid point in W wall of long hall

- 0-10 cm: rootlets and turf
- 10-45 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 45 cm: stone

**NW 2 core 3**, ca 1 m SW of apparent SW corner of long hall

- 0-10 cm: rootlets and turf
- 10-22 cm: mottled yellow brown and medium brown silt
- 22-35 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 35-40 cm: H3 in situ
- 40-60 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 60 cm: stone

**NW 2 core 4** ca 2 m E of apparent door in SE corner of long hall, base of sheep path through thufur.

0-9 cm: rootlets and turf  
9-40 cm: sterile yellow brown silt  
40-45 cm: thick layer of pea-gravel, did not succeed in penetrating this.

**NW 2 core 5** ca 2 m E of possible door in middle of E wall of long hall, near base of large thufur.

0-10 cm: rootlets and turf  
10-45 cm: sterile yellow brown silt.  
45-47 cm: thick layer of pea-gravel, did not succeed in penetrating this.

**NW Discussion:** Only the core 3 S of NW 1 pit house produced any appreciable amount of cultural materials, but the other cores around this structure did turn up what appears to be construction debris. A test pit S of this pit house might be worthwhile in terms of both bone testing and developing more information about construction of the structure. Around the long hall cores are surprisingly sterile, even lacking much in the way of convincing construction debris. While additional coring may turn up some deposit around this structure, the extent and depth of Thufur formation would make excavation very difficult. Very short occupation?

**W** complex of structures is located about 200 m up the dry gully (S) of NW complex, and appears to consist of a deep pit house (test excavated by the FSI structures team) next to a well developed apparent long house and at least two other nearby buildings. Thufur were far less developed in this locality, and there appeared to be a difference in vegetation (mainly crowberries) in the area between the long hall (upslope) and the pit house (downslope).

One core was placed 2 m W (downslope) of the W pithouse (informally designated W 1) that had been test trenched by the structures team.

**W 1 core 1**

0-10 cm: turf and roots  
10-18 cm: mottled yellow brown with charcoal flecks  
18-22 cm: mottled light cream and yellow brown- possible upcast H3  
22-50 cm: sterile yellow brown silt  
50 cm: stone.

Three cores were placed along the W (downslope) side of the long hall, informally called W 2.

**W2 core 1**, c 2 m W of apparent door in NW corner of long hall

0-10 cm; turf and roots

- 10-35 cm: banded (stratified?) layers of dark ash, light ash, ch bone  
flecks, burnt bone. Definite cultural material, probable midden.
- 35-38 cm: apparent H 3 tephra in situ
- 38-55 cm; sterile yellow brown silt
- 55 cm: stone.

**W2 core 2** approximately 6 m downslope (W) of approximate mid po of W wall  
of long hall.

- 0-10 cm: roots and turf
- 10-25 cm: banded (stratified?) layers of mottled grey ash, burnt bone, bone  
flecks, charcoal, wood ash. Cultural material.

**W2 core 3**, approximately 2 m downslope (W) of apparent door area in SW end  
of long hall.

- 0-10 cm: roots and turf
- 10-15 cm: mottled grey-brown with charcoal flecks
- 15- 30 cm: yellow brown silt
- 30-32 cm: H3 in situ
- 32-75 cm: sterile yellow brown silt
- 75 cm: pea gravel layer.

**W discussion:** There appears to be some midden material along the W side of  
the long hall, probably concentrating on the N end and extending  
up to 5-6 m from the wall itself. IF bone preservation is OK, this  
may make a promising target for larger scale excavation.  
Recommend a test pit in this area.

**NE Investigation:** the NE complex lies just S of the modern fence line ear the  
horse barn area of the contemporary Saltvík farm. The lies on  
the E side of a small valley which still has a strongly running brook  
down its center. The prechristian graves are clearly visible along  
the ridgeline to the SW from this area. There is a major complex of  
what appears to be a large rectilinear long house with what may be  
some later rooms added in the S end. The whole structure seems  
to be aligned with (and perhaps partly truncated by) an old  
road/track way that runs along the valley and up the side of the  
slope to the S. The area immediately around this ruin mplex has  
heavy thufur development and it is hard to be absolutely certain of  
the limits of some wall lines. Corings were made along the W side  
of this large structure.

**NE 1 coring 1**, 6 m to the W of the apparent NW corner of the long hall. *Note that a wide belt ca 5 m wide runs along the apparent trackway area just to the W of the structure, these were placed so densely that it was not possible to get a core down between them.*

0-5 cm: turf and roots  
 5-15 cm: medium brown silt with charcoal flecks  
 15-18 cm: H3 apparently in situ  
 18-35 cm: yellow brown silty sterile.  
 35 cm; stone

**NE 1 coring 2**, ca 2 m W of the FSI structures team trench, in the thufur area between the apparent W wall of the long hall and the trackway.

0-15 cm turf and roots  
 15-25 cm med-dark brown sandy silt  
 25-35 cm displaced structural turf ?  
 35-45 cm mottled yellow brown / medium brown silt.  
 45-75 cm sterile yellow brown silt.

**NE 1 coring 3**, ca 4 m W of the core 2, in edge of trackway

0-5 cm turf and roots  
 5-20 cm medium brown silt with some charcoal flecks  
 20-22 cm H3 apparently in situ  
 22-45 cm sterile yellow brown silt.

**NE 1 coring 4**, ca 4 m from apparent SW corner of longhouse in thufur area,

0-5 cm turf and roots  
 5-15 cm mottled brown with turf bits  
 15-18 cm H3 apparently in situ  
 18-45 cm sterile yellow brown silt.

**NE 1 Discussion:** this large structure does not seem to have a great deal of cultural material directly outside it, though it is possible that much has been missed due to the thick thufur development all around. This will of course also make excavation of any intact deposits challenging. My impression is that the trackway has been removed or inhibited extensive deposition along the W side of the unit, but this is more or less a guess. I would recommend that a small unit be put into the trackway surface, as this may be a more complex and formally-constructed feature than it appears from the surface at present.

**Figures**



Pagan Grave site at Saltvík (looking NW), Adolf discusses soil samples with Ian Simpson and his students from Stirling.



Pit house at NW (NW 1), looking N towards Saltvík bay, blue pack rests near cores that produced cultural material



W site area Looking NW down the now-dry valley towards the sea. Flags mark coring that produced possible midden material downslope from possible long hall.

**In archive:** CD with all Aug 12<sup>th</sup> photos and five sketch plans of NW, W, and NE complexes with core locations mapped in.